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LOYOLA UNIVERSITY CHICAGO

THE OCCULT FEMINISM OF MARGARET COUSINS IN MODERN IRELAND

AND INDIA, 1878-1954

VOLUME I (CHAPTERS 1 TO 3)

A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED

TO THE FACULTY OF THE GRADUATE SCHOOL

IN CANDIDACY FOR THE DEGREE OF

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

DEPARTMENT OF HISTORY

BY

CATHERINE CANDY

CHICAGO, ILLINOIS

MAY 1996

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CONTENTS

VOLUME I

INTRODUCTION	1
CHAPTER 1. EMERGING TO SELF-CONSCIOUSNESS	18
CHAPTER 2. SUFFRAGE IN IRELAND AND ENGLAND	42
CHAPTER 3. DUBLIN TO LIVERPOOL	80

VOLUME II

CHAPTER 4. ADYAR TO MADANAPALLE	101
CHAPTER 5. WRITING INDIA; EDUCATING INDIA	154
CHAPTER 6. FRANCHISE AND INDIAN NATIONAL MOVEMENT	217
CONCLUSIONS	292
BIBLIOGRAPHY	343
VITA	367

INTRODUCTION

Margaret Cousins lived in Ireland from 1878 to 1913; in Britain from 1913 to 1915, and in India from then until her death in 1954.¹ In 1907 Cousins founded and led the Irish Women's Franchise League (IWFL), the militant wing of the Irish suffrage movement through its peak years of protest until 1913, after which Theosophy and Indophilia led her through a two year spell in England to settle finally in India.

In India Cousins initiated a successful suffrage campaign and founded the first two nation wide women's movements, the Women's India Association (WIA) in 1917 and the All India Women's Conference (AIWC) in 1927 as umbrella organizations for all of the local Indian women's groups. While the WIA was based in South India and focused on the first wave of the suffrage issue, the far more broadly spread AIWC fronted a massive range of multi levelled issues, although its original purpose was educational curricular reform.

Margaret Cousins wrote four books - two about Indian womanhood, one autobiography, and one comparative study of

¹All mention of "Cousins" and "Cousins's" refers to Margaret Cousins. Where James Cousins is mentioned he is referred to always as James Cousins.

Eastern and Western music. She was an accomplished pianist, a one time medium with the dead, an acquaintance of Mohandas K. Gandhi, W.B. Yeats, James Joyce, Alice Paul, Margaret Sanger, and the first person to write down the Indian national anthem from Rabindranath Tagore.

Margaret Cousins grew up in an Irish rural town as the eldest of the eleven children of a Protestant legal clerk. In university in turn-of-the-century Dublin Cousins encountered the cultural revivalism now often conventionally referred to as the Celtic revival. With many thinkers and writers of the period Cousins's counter cultural and philosophical interests led her to find in the Theosophical Society, a set of values by which she would live her life.

Theosophy formed part of a broader occultist revival of interest in mixing magic, science and philosophy by avant garde intellectuals of the fin-de-siecle. The Theosophical Society was founded in New York City in 1875 by Madame Blavatsky, a Ukrainian Jew who was avowedly raised by Tibetan Buddhist monks. Membership in the Theosophical Society required agreement with three main objects: 1. To form the nucleus of a universal brotherhood of humanity, without distinction of race, creed, sex, caste, or color; 2. The study of ancient and modern religions, philosophies and sciences, and the demonstration of the importance of such study; and 3. The investigation of the unexplained laws of nature and the

psychical powers latent in man.² Theosophy was and is founded on the premise that there is one ancient wisdom prevailing throughout all human consciousness, so that it validates equally, at least in theory, all religions, philosophies, sciences and ways of approaching knowledge or "revealing hidden realities" including intuition, alchemy and communication with the supernatural. Prominent among Theosophists was the belief that the eco-system was activated by a struggle for re-unification with the divine source which had become historically diffused and fragmented throughout the universe, hence the Theosophical dictum "unity in diversity." Theosophists could often syncretize elements of rationalist deism, evolutionist theory, and all religions, with both modern and ancient homeopathic science.

Cousins embraced several aspects of Brahmanical Hindu culture in Dublin before she ever got involved in feminism, or

² For critical studies of Theosophy see Nancy Fix Anderson, "Annie Besant as Champion of Women's Rights," The American Theosophist (Autumn, 1994):3-5; Diana Burfield, "Theosophy and Feminism: Some Explorations," In Women's Religious Experience: Cross Cultural Perspectives Edited by Pat Holden. (New Jersey: Barnes and Noble, 1983); Bruce Campbell, Ancient Wisdom Revived: a History of the Theosophical Movement (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1980); Joy Dixon, "Gender, Politics and Culture in the New Age: Theosophy in England, 1880-1935" (Ph.D Diss., Rutgers University, 1992); Shiv Visvanathan and Ashis Nandy "Modern Medicine and its Non-Modern Critics: A Study in Discourse" in Dominating Knowledge: Development, Culture, and Resistance Eds. Frederique Apffel Marglin and Stephen A. Marglin, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990); Catherine Lowman Wessinger, Annie Besant and Progressive Messianism (Lewiston: The Edwin Mellon Press, 1988).

indeed in the Theosophical Society, such as the adoption with her husband of an ecologically and spiritually principled vegetarianism and a belief in reincarnation, and while all the while she was drinking in Hindu and Buddhist philosophy. Cousins's demand for a liberal tolerant spiritual and political framework was satisfied and encouraged by the Theosophical Society.

Cousins's theoretical inspirations to feminism came from a medley of English and continental occultist spiritual feminist writers such as Anna Bonus Kingsford, Edward Maitland, Swedenborg, and Francis Swiney, who often advocated a particular connection between the feminine and the natural spritual laws of evolving civilization. It was most often advocated that woman had special powers of intuition which gave her an especially pure medium of access to the "other world." The idea of woman's special "ways of knowing," or indeed of being, has been much criticized for its inherently dangerous essentialism.³ By essentialism I mean the idea that the characteristics of femaleness are inherent, rather than made, learned or constructed. The politics of the feminist debate between essentialism and its slippery corrolary of constructivism have extended across several disciplinary

³Criticisms of essentialism are far too numerous to mention, but for good examples see Judith Butler, Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity (New York: Routledge, 1990) and Elizabeth Spelman, Inessential Woman: Problems of Exclusion in Feminist Thought (Boston: Beacon Press, 1988).

fields and debates on the motives, functions, rewards and damages caused by cultural identities and their politics. Many thinkers now appear to agree on at least one point: that we need both constructivism and essentialism to work together.⁴ The consensus appears to be something like this: that while an essentialist idea of "woman" bruises and makes invisible some women's experience, while also limiting and pigeon-holing women's roles, those roles in which women (and men) have been historically gendered need to be remembered - precisely in order to make visible their artificialness. Otherwise the category of "woman" can become so fluid and meaningless that there can be no meeting point for a politics of woman. In the field of history it is crucial that the packing of such roles be examined and questions asked about the precise and historically specific ways in which resistance, complicity and various levels of consciousness to those roles were socially economized, and most crucially on the part of women themselves.

Cousins's response to the theoretical and political dilemma of constructivism and essentialism was to maintain the contradiction in her rhetoric, and to apply it with variously evident degrees of consciousness to her practical, concrete

⁴Differences 7 (Spring 1995); Gayatri Spivak, The Post-Colonial Critic: interviews, strategies, dialogues ed. Sarah Harasym, (New York : Routledge, 1990); Denise Riley, "Am I That Name": Feminism and the Category of Women in History (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1988).

feminist projects. This biography thus focuses on defining the context in which Cousins consciousness of gender as a construction was sometimes raised and sometimes held in check. It is also a methodological experiment in the use of critical biography to access the question of consciousness in identity politics in general. It grapples with questions such as the following: how does one represent the changing ideology of one figure except by constantly reading between the lines of specific political public and private contexts in which Cousins for example enunciated various positions? How "real" was Cousins about these positions at any given time? Cousins's life provides an especially fascinating case for a study in consciousness formation because she thought and acted on such multiple levels - from suffrage and election speeches in rural Ireland and India, to letters to international activists, to occultist reflections in Theosophical journals; to automatic writing sessions and visits from spirits passed over. The chief purchase of Cousins's case then is that it illustrates how Cousins went about mediating her fine feminist theory through what was usually the far cruder media of gender policy formation on various public platforms, and around various issues through three nations in the first half of the twentieth century. It is a study in how social and political contexts shape both rhetoric and consciousness. Who and what defined what Margaret Cousins thought about gender? To what extent did she ever "think for herself?" How and where does

one ascribe intellectual agency, much less originality, to such a case? For example, Cousins's own gender theory of "the femaculine" - an unacknowledged even mix of masculinity and femininity within each individual, reads remarkably like Joan Scott's citation of deconstructionist literary critic, Barbara Johnson's definition of deconstruction as a decentering device by which the grand Fixity of sexual difference is infinitely deferred to a play of micro-fixities.⁵ Such congruence leaves deconstruction and Cousins's feminist theory open for a shared critique by the historian of twentieth century modernist and post modern gender theories.

In Joan Scott's pathbreaking prescription for writing gender history she notices how biography provides an especially useful format and method for investigating the ways in which gender works in an economy of symbols, which women can relate to on a variety of levels at once.⁶ As a contribution to the cultural and intellectual history of feminism Margaret Cousins's case goes one step further in that while her consciousness of the sexual symbolism was acute and

⁵Joan Scott, "Deconstructing Equality Versus Difference," in Conflicts in Feminism ed. Marilyn Hirsch, (New York: Routledge, 1990), 137 and see Jacques Derrida, Speech and Phenomena: And Other Essays on Husserl's Theory of Signs, translated by David B. Allison (Evanston, Ill.: Northwestern University Press, 1973), 130.

⁶Joan Scott, "Gender as a Category of Analysis," in Gender and the Politics of History (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988).

yet (perhaps purposely) not deconstructionist, she was also a gender theorist and amateur feminist historian, who actually sought daily to apply her theory on different levels of social reform and activism. Doing a biography of Margaret Cousins then opens up a face of the first half of the twentieth century which a biography of Joan Scott would surely open up for the second half.

It is here, through careful painstaking contextualization, that history and the history of feminist intellectual life in particular can make a massive, basic and lasting contribution to fields of cultural theory and cross cultural politics, to agenda of radical philosophy, and inter/community building. The root question is one of consciousness - how much of it do "we" need? Who should store it? How should such historically wise theory be made available in moments of social crisis? How much or what kind of theory do we need to better Cousins's performance of sophistry? What was "wrong" or deficient or blocked about her theory? Where did she usefully place her energy, and where was it wasted?

As individuals carrying around our own potential biographies where the personal and the political are integrated, it is the very emphasis of feminism on this integratedness, or perhaps on integrity, and on historicizing the built gaps between public and private, which we are analyzing. Biography affords a manageable example, or a case study, of a "whole" life so that the economy of psychological,

personal, sexual, national, global and cosmological can be seen together and in changing movement through time.⁷ Margaret Cousins's case is particularly interesting because the twentieth century has witnessed so many people moving between and carrying cultures around the globe. Clearly then it is important to note both the skills and the conditions which managed Cousins's phenomenal success as a transnational feminist and conscious internationalist.

A key question here is in what way Theosophy functioned for some populations as a social, religious and political comfort against the divisiveness and cultural fragmentation which characterized the early twentieth century. Theosophy's relationship to empire and to imperial "ways of knowing" is also a point of scrutiny, from Margaret Cousins's limited perspective. Cousins lived perhaps precariously perched as a visionary refugee on the borderlands of so many cultures, sexual, ethnic, religious, even divine/human, and this world/other world, so that Theosophy provided an institutional framework for unity and cohesiveness which yet did not threaten her belief in defining her own identity or minimize her diverse identities, but rather validated her desire to integrate them with respect. The Theosophical Society

⁷ On feminist biographical methodology and theory see Kali Israel, "Writing Inside the Kaleidoscope: Representing Victorian Women Public Figures," Gender and History 2:1 (Spring 1990):40-49, and Brodzki, Bella and Schenck, Life/Lines: Theorizing Women's Autobiography (Ithaca, NY.: Cornell University Press, 1988).

(sometimes literally) provided a "home" in which Margaret Cousins's experience of the twentieth century could be rationalized. It is also my thesis that it was Margaret Cousins's felt sense of disconnection from the native, the primal and the "real" gender which compelled her insistence on "discovering" the real, the authentic. While the fetish for the real which often characterized modernist primitivist thinkers and artists is hardly news, especially in conceptions of Irish and Indian culture, where Cousins's case was distinctive was in her self-conscious attempt to go beyond naming the differences in order to integrate them - in her own words, "to put the personal self in touch with the universal self," as part of the process of "reforming the world according to the heart's desire."

It may still of course be argued that Cousins's insistent universalist integrationism, in terms both of racial and sexual unity, ultimately still depended crucially on reinscribing lines of epistemic difference, however finely intermingled. Cousins's whole life, at every level, worked within this dialectic of self-affirmation and self-denial. But this tension - between diversity and unity - was a creative one, which, as we shall see, went a very long way to break down barriers of sex and race, at different levels, in different places.

Margaret Cousins was one of the most influential theorists in the Irish and Indian national feminist ventures,

and the Theosophical link which ensured her passage from Ireland to India was at once both liberating and potentially and theoretically imperial, both for herself and for the many who came under her influence. It was both a strength and a weakness of Theosophy that it functioned for Cousins as an alternative university, or as an higher authority of knowledge, on to which she could defer responsibility for really carefully thinking through many of the loose ends of her cultural politics that could have dangerously racist implications.

The notion of "Brotherhood" which was so dear to Theosophists and French revolutionaries alike, while obviously sexist, also posited a necessary hierarchy based on a reformist creative evolutionism of originalism, race, species and age. In short it reinstated a modern chivalric nobility and feudal caste theory within its theoretical program for deferred equality - the New Age was always coming rather than arrived. The Theosophical Society self-consciously proposed an alternative codification of racial and sexual categories in conscious revolt against conventional codes.

Theosophists also reshuffled sexual and racial binaries, as alternatives to human/divine binaries, thus always having a comfortable Other on which to project rejected characteristics. Cousins's biography also nuances such suspicious questions as why Ireland and India in particular occupied such a precious place in the Theosophical world

vision of the future; how Theosophists regendered a future globe; how the "good," fraternal, enlightened liberal politics of Theosophy accommodated a notion of an eventual evolution of equality through a slow natural purging of the racial "chaff from the wheat;" and finally how thinkers such as Cousins used this nationalist occultist visionary framework, with all its problems, for feminist agendae.

Cousins's vulnerable and desperate need for connection with the "folk soul," or "race soul," or "the eternal feminine," as Theosophists often put it, burdened and silenced the Other - whether it was Irish culture, Indian culture or female culture - in the very process of ascribing to the Other that spiritual vitality and native intuition lost forever to the overly sophisticated developed culture. While such exoticism was not new to enlightenment thought, the feminist appropriation of it in conjunction with mass movements of decolonization was quite new.

Such assumption, condescension, and insidious disrespect for the racial and sexual Other abounds in Margaret Cousins's feminist ideology. The motive in scrutinizing Cousins's vision for such limitations and blindspots is to contextualize them; to explain what actual specific pressures put such desires and limits in her mind; to explore the extent to which she became aware of such offensiveness in herself and in British, Indian and Irish contemporaries, and finally to ask if it did more good than harm.

I position the politics of Theosophy in an ambivalently imperial framework asking if Theosophy can be seen as a new version of the classically imperial missionary medium which Theosophists deliberately and actively sought to counteract. Theosophists thus often ended up, perhaps not surprisingly, continuing much of the colonial style, while they also lent themselves to forces of liberation beyond their eventual control. Such turn-of-the-century New Age groups continued the romantic anti-rationalist reaction and helped spread counter cultural quests for wholeness throughout almost the entire twentieth century middle class world.

If nationalism, as Benedict Anderson suggests, served to replicate the cohesiveness of religious community, it is suggested here that empire, and imperial ways of seeing, unconsciously did the same for Theosophists.⁸ Theosophists such as Cousins functioned as communicators and healers within the imperial community, despite the fact that she became a conscious Indian nationalist by the 1930s.

This study then suggests a new direction and a new context for the study of imperial ideology-making in asking if the Theosophical cultural nationalist, "anti-imperial" insistence on preserving and reviving cultures of racial and sexual alterity, was a response to a felt need to secure

⁸Benedict Anderson, Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism (London: Verso, 1983).

hierarchies of identity which were felt to be threatened at once by modern racial "mongrelization," class levelling, and sexual confusion. In Cousins's case at least, it was this compulsion for a native Irish Celtic cultural alterity and a desire to integrate alternating sexual currents within her self which fundamentally compelled her critique of Irish society, displaced her from Ireland, and ultimately drew her to take determined refuge in what she envisioned as a more securely alternative context - India. In India, the challenges seemed harder, the progress more visible, and she was more appreciated. India had a more complex cultural ecology than Ireland. With some notable exceptions, as Cousins would discover, India had a far more generous policy about diversity. Hence its appeal to Theosophists in the first place.

The tone and approach of the thesis is then appropriately both sympathetic and critical - perhaps almost inevitably replicating the same dialectic which Cousins suffered and enjoyed. This critical biography looks at the continually changing process of the interlock of Cousins's spirituality, sexuality and politics. It thus operates with respect to several historiographical debates, such as the question of feminist internationalism and possibilities of a universalist feminism; the white woman's imperial racist feminist burden; and the need to revise the integral relationships between the function of religion, sexual cultural politics and empire; and

between occultist epistemologies of science and progress.

The thesis is embodied in the biographical narrative of Cousins's consciousness. The narrative is designed at every turn to answer a critical mesh of questions, which to save constant repetition throughout the text will be summarized here: What was different and consistent about Cousins's ideological premises and activistic styles in Ireland and India? In what ways did Cousins reconstruct a sense of Irishness for feminist advantage both in Ireland and in India? What specific conditions pressed one Irish Protestant woman to develop a New Age philosophy as a liberatory exit from a turn-of-the-century Irish patriarchal society? How did Cousins invoke a notional Indianness and orientalism for her feminist internationalism? How did she combine her various national identities, her anti-imperialism and her universalism in the year to year politics of her service - first to Annie Besant's Theosophical program for social reform in India, then to Indian feminism, and then to the Indian national movement? What follows then is an integrated delineation of the conditions which provoked, facilitated and limited Cousins's articulation of a feminist consciousness.

One of the key sources used here is the autobiography We Two Together which Cousins wrote with her husband, James Cousins, which was published in Madras in 1950.⁹ While Cousins

⁹James H. Cousins and Margaret E. Cousins, We Two Together (Madras: Ganesh, 1950).

makes reference in the autobiography itself to the fact that she was writing it from old diaries carried to India from Ireland, she also relied a lot of course on memory. I have used We Two Together having judiciously weighed the evidence against other more contemporary sources, and indeed deliberately for the insights which it affords in to how Cousins wanted herself remembered.

It is worth noting that it was James Cousins who wrote approximately two thirds of We Two Together to his wife's one third. James Cousins also wrote in an overly verbose, detailed style in which he recorded all the events and encounters of his own life, all the while posing his role as central. Margaret Cousins by contrast tended to contextualize her past self always as one player in a series of much broader social, political and intellectual movements. Her contribution to the autobiography is also much more compact, far more precise and for that reason, much more rich. Margaret Cousins's comparatively much more modest writing style in the autobiography is also a reflection of what was her general personal style of communication vis-a-vis that of her husband.

Margaret and James Cousins both lived as critical modernists. They lived the dialectic of modernity, finally, as well as from the beginning, pinning all their hopes on "alternative" cultures to "brake" the headlong rush of western modernity. Their choice to imagine "native" Irish, Indian and female cultures as the holders of the most pure alternatives

to modern western masculinism was part of a colonial epistemological history which they were not aware of.

CHAPTER 1

EMERGING TO SELF-CONSCIOUSNESS

Margaret Cousins, was born as Margaret Elizabeth Gillespie in 1878, Boyle, County Roscommon in the West of Ireland. Her family were members of the Protestant Church of Ireland whose ancestors had migrated from Scotland towards the close of the previous century.¹ The economic trajectory of the Gillespie family in Irish society was somewhat unusual in that the Gillespies were gaining land while their co-religionists of the ascendancy class were in the process of losing it. And this on top of the disestablishment of the Church of Ireland in 1868. Margaret Gillespie's Father, Joseph Gillespie, was a

¹ The town of Boyle developed around the estate of the landlords the King family, planters of Yorkshire stock to whom James I in 1613 granted the third assignment of the Boyle Cistercian Abbey lands, chartering Boyle as a corporate borough in the process. A district courthouse and two story jail were built shortly thereafter in order to reduce this historically rebellious area to civility. During the same wave of settlement came the Gore-Booths, Parkes and Cooper families, all of whom became the landlord ascendancy of the Sligo-Roscommon-Leitrim area. Sometime possibly in the late eighteenth century when the Kings retired from their town house in Boyle to the calmer shores of Lough Key, the town house was transformed into a barracks from which soldiers paraded each Sunday to the Church of Ireland led by a marching band. It was incidentally the King's son, Edward, who drowned in the Irish Sea on returning home from Cambridge, to be mourned as the subject of John Milton's poem "Lycidas."

clerk of the Petty sessions in the Boyle courthouse. In her autobiography, We Two Together, the later (married) Margaret Cousins gave the semi-colonial circumstances of her birth short shrift. Although mentioning that "though we were Protestants and Unionists and my Father a Government official," the family, she explained, never experienced any "window-breaking" and the like because of her Father's "charm and kindness". With a passing sigh of nostalgia for the days

²Boyle at this time was an important regional business center, with a population of about three thousand, a maize mill, one of the first post offices in the country, and a newspaper, the Roscommon Herald. Although Joseph Gillespie was employed as a clerk of the petty sessions in Boyle Court House the Gillespies came from landowning stock and were members of the Church of Ireland. The Gillespies were a little unusual amongst nineteenth century Irish Protestant landlords in that they were relative latecomers to land ownership. A manuscript family genealogy compiled in the 1920s suggests that the first of the Gillespies came to Ireland from Scotland toward the close of the eighteenth century. According to the family genealogy Hugh Gillespie served in the yeomanry militia in counties "Wicklow or Wexford" in 1793, while his sister Mary married John Shera, a Methodist farmer in Carrick-on-Shannon, County Leitrim. Successive generations of the Sheras married into the (Church of Ireland) Gillespies. Shortly after joining his sister in Leitrim, Hugh Gillespie married a local woman, Mary Tweedy. Hugh Gillespie's youngest son, Joseph, inherited what would become the mainstay Gillespie farm at Mount Prospect near Boyle, County Roscommon. Here Joseph Gillespie, with his wife Sarah Jenkins, raised five sons and two daughters. It was their third son Joseph who married Margaret Shera in 1875 and three years later gave birth to the subject of this piece, Margaret Elizabeth Gillespie; this information was included in a typescript genealogy given to the author by Mrs Darrie Gillespie and Mrs Miriam Sweetnam, surviving relatives of Margaret Cousins in Ireland. This copy was taken from an original genealogical manuscript compiled by Margaret Cousins's brother-in-law, Pierce Leslie Pielou, the original of which has since been lost.

when "the personal equation" overruled the party label, Cousins left unturned the question of her local definition as a Unionist and Protestant. Cousins's construction of her nationalist influences were, not surprisingly, far more eager. On this note she told of how her heart "belonged from the beginning" to "the fighters for freedom;" of how in her early adolescence she was swept up by "swirls of patriotic emotion," and most romantically, how she remembered nationalist leader Charles Stewart Parnell, for his noble virility: "tall, bearded, frock-coated, pale, tense, masterful."³

Such a class positioning acceded to Joseph Gillespie's daughters a materially comfortable childhood with two house servants in their twelve roomed house.⁴ Cousins grew up in a

³Ibid., 24.

⁴ When Joseph Gillespie's brother died, Joseph took over his post as clerk of the petty sessions in Boyle Court House. By 1925, ten years after the Cousinses departure for India, and with most of the family reared, the Gillespie family moved from the Crescent to what is still one of the more impressive residences of the town: a very large, fourteen-roomed, ivied, house which overlooks the well - preserved twelfth century Cistercian Abbey. When Joseph Gillespie died in 1930 he left a substantial personal estate of 132 pounds. Another indication of the rarified social world of the Gillespies is apparent in the facility with which they traveled the world. Judging by the movement of various of her brothers and sisters to places such as South Africa, Trinidad, and Canada, the Gillespies seem to have enjoyed a sense of a world at their feet which differed strikingly from the far more limited range of geographical options available to most Catholic emigrants. While Cousins makes hardly any mention of her siblings in her memoirs this is probably owing to the distance which had elapsed by the time of her writing. Also the rather diasporic scattering of the family may account in part for Margaret Cousins's apparently distant relations with the family having left Boyle, and particularly once having left Ireland. While still

genteel atmosphere acquiring "a good, sound elementary education" from the Boyle co-educational national school in which such subjects as French and piano were "taught by two cultured gentlewomen who made an impression for life" on her by their "cleverness and by their public service."⁵ It was also her grandmother who inspired Cousins's lifelong aesthetic appreciation for flowers, painting, music and the like, enthusiasms which only such classes could afford.⁶ Cousins's aspirations to study music in Leipzig were quelled apparently by a three year scholarship to the Victoria Boarding School in Londonderry.⁷ On leaving boarding school the last piece of

in Ireland at least Cousins maintained close contact with those sisters closest to her in age. Anne Gillespie, the next youngest to Margaret, followed on Margaret's talent for music, becoming gold and silver medalist at the all-Ireland Feis Ceoil competitions and becoming a soloist in the National Ladies' Choir. Anne married Pierce Leslie Pielou of Dublin, took an active part in the suffrage movement with Margaret, and died unexpectedly in 1912, probably from tuberculosis. Two more of Margaret's younger sisters also followed her artistic bent: Eva also graduated from the Royal University in Dublin before emigrating to Winnipeg and Florence became an accomplished artist and taught in Dublin's private Alexandra College for girls, an institution which spawned many feminists. Some years after Margaret had left Ireland, Eva married Anne's widower, Pierce Leslie Pielou. Some of Cousins's siblings stayed in Ireland through marrying securely into strong farming and professional classes, none apparently ever marrying outside the Protestant church.

⁵Cousins and Cousins, 25.

⁶Ibid., 55.

⁷ Cousins explains "the experience of living with eighty young women between the ages of fourteen and twenty knocked the corners off my priggish provincialism, and developed my power of working with organized groups of women, and the development of almost a sixth sense in

advice given to her by the headmistress was that she should be "less independent:"

that life would be easier for me if I was more like other girls. I listened to her politely and often recalled her words. But my nature was free and original in its bent. I could be happy only in doing what I felt was right in principle, not because other people did it.⁸

Cousins constructed her childhood personality as an embryo version of qualities which she prized in her adult self-image, adjudging that while her youthful appearance was rather plain, it was compensated for by a distinctive sense of wisdom, trustworthiness, originality of thought, and "unending natural curiosity: "Everyone decided I had brains and could actually think for myself."⁹ This independence of thought was however motivated by the strong religious and moral sensibility which pervaded Cousins's childhood. In her account Cousins simply assembled all the ingredients which fed into her vocation to a lay ministry. The later Theosophist looked back nostalgically on her early religious acculturation:

Religion was a very practical technique of life then. Hell and fear of punishment bulked large in it. On the other side there was faith in a loving

judging character and moving easily with people;"Ibid., 27.

⁸Ibid., 50.

⁹Ibid., 54.

Father which gave great security.¹⁰

The author also celebrated her early self awareness in rejecting dolls in favor of reading biographies. Not surprisingly for one who had early committed herself to sainthood, although as "a cheerful saint" provisionally, it was "the lives of women saints and especially Joan of Arc" which ranked top of her reading library. Cousins recalled how from a young age she appreciated the emotional benefits which devotion to a cause brought her - "the more difficult a struggle was the more cheerful I became."¹¹

Despite the nostalgic overlay, Cousins's assertion that she was then inspired to "serve God and humanity" was quite likely true.¹²

In the autobiography Cousins also emphasized her early romantic attraction to the supernatural atmosphere of local ruins "inhabited by legendary faeries and Celtic Goddesses" and to Boyle's Cistercian Abbey - "a magnet for my eyes and a treat for my whole being."¹³ Although she fondly remembered weekends reading classical novels in the school library, the later occultist also remembered how when her parents left the house she climbed to the forbidden top shelf of a book case

¹⁰Ibid., 23.

¹¹Ibid., 33.

¹²Ibid., 23.

¹³Ibid., 24.

and gratified her mind with "true ghost stories and numbers of Stead's Review of Reviews, including "a sketch of a remarkable woman, Madame H.P. Blavatsky."¹⁴

Cousins's prefiguration of her later occultist self also extended to a construction of her earlier self as a natural reformer. Fundamental to Cousins's portrayal of her childhood is a sense of the benign innocence of the child who accumulated the skills and the motivation for a reformist idealism - "for changing things into better shape." With characteristic good cheer as well as autobiographical diplomacy she omitted mention of any negative influences apart from her father's stern control of the family finances; "And it was there and then that my girlish determination began to try and change the financial status of wives and mothers, who all worked so hard and got no money for themselves."¹⁵ All the elements which would afterwards mark the mode and the motivation of the author's activism are there: her romantic crusading zeal for "freedom" and justice; her staunch admiration of public and religious service, her iconoclasm for saints, and particularly for the bold sexual transgressiveness of Joan of Arc.

Cousins began a degree course in music in the Royal University, Dublin, in 1898. She recalled the moment as a "jolly, widening, cultural period of expansion of mind and

¹⁴Ibid., 27.

¹⁵Ibid., 55.

experience such as fell to the lot of few girls." Cousins counted herself lucky however more on account of the coincidence of her student days with that turn-of-the-century literary movement which would later be termed the Celtic Revival than because of the enormous social privilege which supported her third level education. "In 1898 I began to break my shell from the inside...I had a clear course of study which I had always longed for. For the first time I was my own mistress."¹⁶ Dublin was then, as Cousins recalled, a magnet for cultural mavericks individually and collectively attempting to redefine the national identity. One such figure whose road to Dublin was in many respects culturally parallel to Margaret Cousins's was a young poet and her future husband, James Cousins, whom she met about eighteen months after her arrival in the capital. James Cousins's cultural interests would have a defining role in shaping Margaret Cousins's life. James Cousins was raised in a working class Methodist family in Belfast. Owing to the death of his Father and ensuing family financial constraints James Cousins was unable to take advantage of secondary schooling, working instead for a short period as secretary to the mayor of Belfast and as a part time teacher of short-hand. As a largely self-educated young poet of limited talent with an evidently lifelong insatiable desire for literary recognition, James Cousins had in 1897 left Belfast and what he regarded as its stifling intellectual

¹⁶Ibid., 51.

narrowness for the more lively intellectual culture of Dublin. While working by day as a clerk in a coal and shipping company, he was already moving in Dublin's literary circles by the time he met Margaret in July of 1899. It was perhaps only a matter of time before their paths crossed. Obviously comparing notes as they wrote of their meeting, they matched each other in being disarmingly frank. First Margaret:

I had a clear idea that it would be a tragic fate to become an old-maid. I knew I would like to get married and enjoy a life-companionship with a man whom I would respect and love...I also had formulated my ideal quite vividly: he must be tall and dark, a professor with a beautiful voice.¹⁷

Cousins's fantasy of a dark continental suitor, like her refined Italian music professor Michele Esposito, would probably have satisfied certain of her family's bourgeois expectations. Some time previously James had ended an uninspired relationship with "a Belfast girl" after which he had foresworn himself against any more "conventional falling in love," and moreover he remembered deciding that his life partner should be as dedicated as he was to an unconventional "mutual search for reality."¹⁸ It was Margaret's nobility, idealism and impulse to "disinterested service" which decided for him that the marriage would be; "on my side, neither a

¹⁷Ibid., 86.

¹⁸Ibid., 79.

racial expedient nor a personal satisfaction, but a high privilege and spiritual responsibility."¹⁹ James Cousins was also "new man" enough to appreciate what he saw as the forthright, driven, "masculinity" of his partner - an advertisement which allowed him concomitantly to bask in the "feminine" attributes of receptiveness and creativeness which he fancied in himself.²⁰ Not insignificantly however, James Cousins's anticipation of a marriage which would broaden him into "real manhood" by stimulating his "latent womanhood," goes unanswered by his wife. Margaret Cousins was equally candid in revealing her initial dislike of her suitor, admitting, as above, that it was her fear of becoming an "old maid" which sealed her agreement to an engagement, although very gradually over the three years of their engagement she was "won over" by her future husband's affections.²¹

Both partners conceived the arrangement as a co-operative venture in the promotion of a spiritual culture which would unify their marriage as well as the world: "Jim and I had realised that our surest unity was in our similar aspirations to build purity and beauty and harmony into our lives and into the world".²² Both partners also made the point of presenting the "wedding album" portrayal of the bride in

¹⁹Ibid., 83.

²⁰Ibid., 113.

²¹Ibid., 86.

²²Ibid., 87.

strictly alternative mode:

It was no sixpenny novelists' shy maiden who accompanied me on my honeymoon, but a free-minded young woman who saw no sense in being self-conscious on an occasion through which all the world and his wife had gone, and would go for some millions of years to come...She carried her wedding bouquet from the station entrance to the carriage in full sight of the universe and stacked it on the parcel-rack with its festive ribbons dangling in the breeze.²³

Margaret Cousins made a point of maintaining this frank, business-like, down-to-earth attitude as a woman in general and as a married woman in particular. In letters to colleagues and throughout the autobiography she always made it clear that there was mutual freedom of action in the relationship. Here Cousins registered, at least retrospectively, a hint of anger at the lack of pre-marital sexual education prevalent among at least some classes of Victorian women and chafes at the subtle characterization of girls as delicate.

What an amazing driving-force is that of life! The "life-force" was then a fashionable phrase, due perhaps to Bernard Shaw's virile use of it. It had as its allies, the "glamour" that girls retained in the way of dressing their hair, a certain delicacy which called for protection; and its stronger ally was undoubtedly the ignorance of girls as to the facts of sex.²⁴

²³Ibid., 89.

²⁴Ibid., 89.

Margaret Cousins's style of baulking at conventional Victorian gender roles also appealed to James Cousins's avant garde self image. It was James Cousins who recalled that it was Margaret who first moved to transform their relationship from friendship to romance with the announcement "You may kiss me if you like," and it was James again who made a point of telling of his wife's forthright deportment as a newly-wed bride.

During the engagement James Cousins had reassured his future wife that "anything about the coming of children" would be her decision. Soon after their marriage in 1903 Margaret experienced deep and prolonged trauma on her discovery of the sexual act which she found to be degrading and shameful:

My new knowledge, though I was lovingly safeguarded from it, made me ashamed of humanity and ashamed for it. I found myself looking on men and women as degraded by this demand of nature. Something in me revolted then, and has ever since protested against, certain of the techniques of nature connected with sex. Nor will I and many men and women of like nature, including my husband, be satisfied, be purified and redeemed, life after life, until the evolution of form has substituted some more artistic way of continuance of the race.²⁵

Clearly Cousins saw no value of pleasure in the act of sexual intimacy, casting it in mechanical, Darwinian terms as a

²⁵Ibid., 108.

"technique of nature in the evolution of form." It is yet interesting that she should frame her disdain for sexual intercourse in terms of evolution of species, and especially interesting in view of both partners' interpretation of the marriage as a betrothal of vegetarian, pacifist, creature-friendly spirits. It was literally at the wedding banquet where Cousins announced her decision to join her husband in his vegetarianism. It had recently occurred to Cousins:

as in a blinding light of unarguable truth: If it is not necessary for health that I should demand living creatures, small and large, to be slaughtered, and their flesh to be cooked for food for me, then it is murder, and a crime for me to be a party to such cruelty and wickedness..... It was like a betrothal of spirits. He [James Cousins] never doubted that I would live up to my vision of a bloodless, slaughterless dietary, just as I never doubted that he would carry out his promise about sex-relationships. So we were very happy between ourselves, like wise children.²⁶

James Cousins was eager to assure readers of the autobiography that he neither pushed the vegetarian way nor "the family way" on his wife:

I had not even hoped that my assurance to her of complete freedom in all our relationships would be met by any concession from her side. Her voluntary determination to join me in the purification of our physical lives, in setting ourselves right with the creatures that shared life with us on the planet, was to me an invisible marriage, deeper and more binding than the ritual of conventional

²⁶Ibid., 90.

respectability through which we had just passed."

The counter cultural world of fin-de siecle Dublin in which the Cousinses socialized tended to encourage various programs for "physical regeneration" including temperance, anti-smoking, vegetarianism and explorations in "oriental philosophies" of pacifism and non-violence. While neither of the Cousinses enjoyed smoking or drinking James Cousins had become a vegetarian before he met Margaret. Margaret Cousins explained how while she argued at first against James Cousins's "food-faddism" she also found the Dublin vegetarian restaurant appealing as it was the rendez-vous for both the literary set and the Indian vegetarian student set.

While Margaret Cousins's repugnant discovery of sexual intercourse came shortly after her commitment to vegetarianism, (such that friends attributed her traumatized paleness to a dietary deficiency) both partners seem to imply a certain symbolic reciprocity between celibacy and the "non-flesh diet." The Cousinses explained their resolution in the spirit of their pacifist philosophy of vegetarianism, physical regeneration and dietetic reform, as a less shameful, cruel and brutal "technique of nature" to evolve form. It was entirely fitting that their enshrinement of the marital exchange in terms of what they perceived as the counter-

²⁷Ibid., 83.

cultural Indian terminology of non-violence or ahimsa kept them spiritually bonded together as propagators of a counter-culture rather than as literal progenitors. The marriage was an unacknowledged and perhaps unintended practical subversion of physical (hetero)sexuality which was however socially and theoretically contained within an unquestionably (hetero)sexual frame.

What is interesting here is Margaret Cousins's militant, almost apocalyptic evocation of her enlightenment by a "new sense of life." The Cousinses mingled with Indian students, absorbing what James Cousins would term "the call of the rishis" with their highly principled vegetarian food. The Cousinses over these years got a reputation for their "high plane of existence" so many were the good causes they championed. By 1906 the Cousinses had instituted weekly vegetarian "at homes" at their house on Sandymount Strand for their friends amongst the literary, occultist and Indian philosophy set. There, according to Margaret Cousins, "the tide turned" and an occultist was born. Cousins locates the genesis of her occultism in that heady vortex of modernism, occultism and avant garde social and political criticism figured for her by George Russell (AE), Ibsen and Shaw: "And Ireland itself was a focal point in just those years, and we were right in the middle of it."²⁸

Cousins recalled that it was "sometime in 1901" when her

²⁸Ibid., 105-106.

"whole conventional religious edifice of belief crashed." It is further interesting that she should cast her ensuing two and half year period of agnosticism as the revolt of her free reason against the credulity of her "people" and "especially" of her father in the literal inspiration of the English Bible.²⁹ It was as though the Cousinses were searching for a central metaphysical principle to bind their complex of causes into one and so it is not surprising that Theosophy fitted the bill. Certain lines of affinity may be noted between Cousins's simultaneous burgeoning enthusiasm for Theosophy, modernist music and "traditional" folk music. Cousins's music professor was the Neapolitan master pianist Michele Esposito whose dream, according to Cousins, was to bring "Ireland into step with continental music." Esposito introduced Cousins to "a world of musical intoxications:" "When Paderewski gave his first recital in Dublin of Debussy's "Reflects dans l'eau" I was raised to the seventh heaven of happiness." Excited by this "new world of tonal effects," Cousins immediately bought a copy of the Debussy piece, and "rejoiced in its strangeness." It is significant of the times that Esposito was also actively involved in organizing the Feis Ceoil nation-wide competitions in traditional Irish music which formed part of the general movement for the revival of traditional Irish

²⁹Ibid., 87; the self-infantilization in face of the "elder" Besant was possibly calculated to sate Besant worshippers - many of whom would have had an interest in reading the Cousinses' autobiography.

culture. Esposito's dual championing of both continental modernist music and Irish folk music was mirrored by his devoted student. In her autobiography Cousins protested rather strainedly that the folk music revival "was all but a natural extension of my early life in rural Ireland....As warp and woof of the life of the western Irish had we children not danced, in country lanes and at crossroads, quadrilles, polkas, jigs and reels." Whether or not wholly inspired by Esposito's cultural interests, Cousins held her dual commitment to popularizing the aesthetics of continental modernism and indigenous folk music, as well as to theorizing on the purposes of the two as media for cultural interchange, as almost sacred throughout her life.

Cousins's interest in both continental modernist and "traditional" folk music would become one of her lifelong themes. Modernist aesthetics seemed to offer an alternative account of the constitution of the individual. While Cousins sensed in modernist aesthetics an exciting mode of access to "strange new worlds," she extended a basically romantic and moral framework to contain it, believing its "strangeness" to be a refined version of a sort of primal cultural scream which would liberate the intuitive, the suppressed, the primal "truth" from what she perceived as the relative straitjacket of a Victorian moral universe. Far from seeing it as a hermeneutic laboratory for its own sake, Cousins rather perceived modernist experimentalism as a crucially open-minded

cultural laboratory, whose outcome however would still prove the spiritual unity of all beings, a unity which Cousins seems to find absent in her local world. In this perspective Cousins's "dual" interest in experimental and "traditional" culture was one. A similar metaphysical insecurity motivated Cousins's embrace of Theosophy and the occult. During Cousins's first summer holidays from university, with her "mind free for flowing to the ocean," she discovered The Secret Doctrine, a key theosophical text in Madame Helena Petrova Blavatsky's encyclopedic work of 1888. Cousins described the moment of her encounter with theosophy in terms of an intimate intercourse with a new, big, strange, and enticingly virile universe:

I entered a new universe and a new universe entered me. I didn't understand in detail a tenth of what I was reading. But I got an expansion of consciousness about time, space, ethnology, cosmogony, symbolism, magic and religions that would last me for this life.... Though I understood so little yet, the bigness, strangeness, newness of the subject matter, the virility of the style, the curiosity it awoke in me, held my interest without flagging.³⁰

A "new scientific" interpretation of the Bible and Christianity by Dr. Anna Bonus Kingsford and Edward Maitland, The Perfect Way also made a convincing impression on her as they "reinstated esoteric Christianity in my life, and were

³⁰Ibid., 103-104.

complementary to the oriental occultism I had been drinking in through Blavatsky's vast sweeps of occult knowledge."³¹ One Dr R.V. Kedkar, from Kolhapur in Western India, was on hand for weekly readings of the Bhagavad Gita at the Cousinses' home. It was the trinity of Blavatsky, Kingsford and Khedkar who provided the framework for the Cousinses' religious and philosophical explorations. Cousins was particularly taken by the idea of reincarnation which "answered more questions than anything we had ever come across before, and seemed to make more sense in the pattern and purpose of life than we had ever imagined."³²

In her autobiography Cousins recorded how Kingsford had "prepared her mind" for the cause of feminism.³³ Indeed one of the reasons that Theosophy attracted Cousins, as well as many others of her generation, was owing to the emphasis which Theosophists generally placed on sexual equity in theory and in the organization, and on the idea of the mutability of the

³¹Anna Bonus Kingsford, The Perfect Way (London: Croom and Helm, 1891).

³²Ibid., 105; Writing in the late 1940s Cousins remembered being taken by the idea of a relativity of morals or truth which is interesting in view of the fact that earlier in 1921 she revealed how as she grew older her "childlike faith was shaken" to discover that not everyone held themselves accountable to "the supreme necessity of absolute truthfulness" in affairs of business, politics and gossip, and how it was "re-established only by the clear teachings of Theosophy on the subject." Cousins, "Theosophy and Truthfulness," Adyar Bulletin (May 1921): 117-121.

³³Ibid., 129.

gender of the soul through the eternal process of reincarnation.³⁴ This explanation implied that no one gender reigned sovereign over the other, and further, that every human being was composed equally of both sexual essences. Cousins became a devout proponent of this attempt to renovate a "traditional" Hindu concept of gender, as it appeared to subvert the hard and fast boundaries of completely separate sexual spheres. Cousins coined this "new" sexual epistemology the "femaculine," explaining that it contained:

a community of function on the mental side and diversity of function on the physical side and behind both a spiritual unity which coheres all diversity of manifestation... a synthesis of the virtues of the masculine and feminine in which the defects of each are balanced if not eliminated.³⁵

³⁴ See Joy Dixon, "Gender and Spirituality: Theosophy in England, 1888-1925" (Ph.D diss., Rutgers University, 1992), 127-134; and Cousins: "The writings of Anna Bonus Kingsford had already affirmed woman to me as spiritually co-equal with man. This I felt was bound to demonstrate itself when the man-dominated era would have worked itself out to its uttermost;" Cousins and Cousins, 129.

³⁵ In 1912 Cousins began promoting the idea of the "femaculine" in the early issues of the Irish Citizen, but it is most likely that she was espousing it both publicly and privately as early as 1905; Cousins would later in India reinvent a golden age in Indian history when the sexes were perfectly balanced, reinstating the Hindu God/ess Ardhanarishwara, half-lady, half-lord as the original "femaculine"; "The Ideal Woman," Stri Dharma, 13:9 (July 1930): 7; Cousins also frequently interchanged Celtic and Hindu traditions notably in asserting the complementary egalitarian relationship between the wives and high Kings of ancient Tara, which she translated in India as an ancient

Although Cousins was boldly flirting here with a concept of androgyny in her ascription of the "natural properties" of both sexes to each individual, ultimately the ideal gender blend she proposed was still predicated on a theory of sexual essentialism, just more loosely defined.³⁶

Around the same time Cousins discovered that "latent" within herself were intuitive powers for "automatically" receiving messages from higher sources through an occultist instrument called a planchette. This facility was encouraged by the occultist support for the common notion of the feminine mind as more intuitive, passive and emotional, and therefore diametrically opposed to the rational and critical other. Cousins's theosophical spiritual meditations opened marvellous channels of creativity for her as she began to write whatever came into her head from a mixture of "folk tales, truths discovered through group consciousness, experiences of Karma

Brahmin tradition: "time was in India when she could boast of her daughters as women of individuality, power and capacity; Cousins, The Awakening of Asian Womanhood (Madras: Ganesh, 1922), 152; Cousins's tendency to reinvent golden ages whether for purely manipulative rhetorical reasons or otherwise poses a nice contrast to a comment of Hanna Sheehy Skeffington made in 1912; "Some Celtic enthusiasts hold the average Irishman very high above petty sex spite and prejudice, and quote ancient Irish traditions of womanhood in support of their theory. One learns, however, to distrust this thriftless Irish habit of living on the reputation of its ancestors, especially when one is faced with the problems of Ireland to-day." Irish Review II (July 1912): 225-227.

³⁶ Cousins's deconstruction of gender bears a remarkable similarity to Joan W. Scott's, "Deconstructing Equality Versus Difference," in Conflicts in Feminism Edited by Marilyn Hirsch, (New York: Routledge, 1990).

and inspiration from Kingsford's 'Doctrine of the Genius.'" Cousins blended them together to come up with what she treasured as her "illuminations and inspirations" which were "always a mystery to me, and proved itself to the mind as 'straight knowledge' of a spiritually exciting kind." Cousins's celebration of her passive mind as a clear, pure, naive, spiritual medium echoes the self-congratulation of the intuitive rightness of her childhood vision. A similar property of innocence and purity of spiritual vision was customarily ascribed by Celtic revivalists and occultists to "the unspoiled peasantry of the West [of Ireland]," as James Cousins summarily ethnographized that population. The ways in which Margaret Cousins turned the overlap of images of woman and Irishness to feminist use will be discussed in more depth in the concluding chapter but it is important to mark here the seminal role of figures such as Margaret Cousins who popularized "New Age" notions of a pure and essential femininity and burdened a notional ahistorical Irish woman with the responsibility of otherness, while she went on to live the larger proportion of her life out of Ireland. It was exactly "out of Ireland" where her Irishness became even more important as a mark of identity of a somewhat vulnerably equivalent otherness to Indian woman's otherness, as constructed in Indian nationalist, orientalist and imperial frameworks.

Owing to the situation of Cousins's feminism in an

occultist and orientalist metaphysical world view, the othering of the Irish woman thus helped, well before Cousins left Dublin, to secure the orientalist framework of gender while at the exact same time securing the "hibernicist" notion of gender within Britain and Ireland. To what extent this owed something to Cousins's Protestant background is an interesting but highly problematic issue. To argue that a Protestant simply had to have had some colonial/imperial "blood" in them, however well masked, as well as carrying at the very least a cultural essentialist assumption, also evades and projects the essentialist politics of "non-Protestants" onto Protestants. Yet the high number of occultists and Celticists at the turn of the century, who did come from Protestant families, were often historically materially privileged by their ancestor's confessional choices, as indeed in certain other specific circumstances were some Catholics. So that the question of attributing Cousins's fetish for a pure native culture to her family's religion while it raises an interesting set of historiographical problems, in the end really does not help us to understand all that much about the context in which certain feminisms were constructed in early twentieth century Ireland.

Another problem with taking all of Cousins's essentialist remarks about the nature of woman and Irishwoman into critical account, is that, at least reading backwards from her rhetorical sophistry in Indian journalism, we can see how Cousins's was extremely adept at saying what she thought

people wanted to hear as well as what she thought they needed to hear. So the question of taking all of her rhetorical and ideological remarks at face value, as if she should always be both constant and sincere, is always up for interpretive grabs.

CHAPTER 2

SUFFRAGE IN IRELAND AND ENGLAND

During those crucial years in which Cousins was "receiving" feminism the Cousinses made several visits to various new age groups in London where they made it a priority, as James Cousins put it, to "consume as much heterodoxy as was possible." While attending a vegetarian conference in Manchester in 1906, which happily, (and perhaps logically) coincided with a conference of the National Council of Women, Cousins became aware of the English movement for women's suffrage. Thus, it was largely through the influence of new age reform movements of vegetarianism and spiritualism that Cousins's interest in social reform in general was sparked, leading her eventually to commit her activism to women's suffrage. Perhaps it was no coincidence that Cousins should have encountered organized feminism through organized vegetarianism, as she regarded the animal as well as the woman as cruelly deprived of civic rights. Therefore it was through this holistic conglomeration of subversive activism and specifically through animal rights activism that Cousins found her public voice, literally first speaking in public at a

vegetarian banquet.

From 1906 on Cousins closely followed the English suffragists' campaign in Votes for Women, the organ of the Pankhursts' Women's Social and Political Union (WSPU). The WSPU struck a chord with what Cousins recalled as her "instinctive rebellion against conventions which gave women less freedom than men, fewer opportunities, smaller pay, less education, lower status."¹

What Cousins was really inspired by however was the soul stirring sense of fusion, movement and solidarity between the women:

I eagerly followed the doings of the militants with full understanding of their aims, methods and spirit. I felt so much one of them that I longed for some way in which the women of Ireland might be colleagues in such a soul-stirring and needed movement for the freeing of world-womanhood from the shackles, injustices, inequalities and denial of citizen rights and responsibilities under which women suffered.²

While Cousins may not exactly have been thinking in terms of world-womanhood in 1906, and was most probably embellishing her memory of it here in the autobiography (written some forty four years later) as the epiphanous spark to her later feminist internationalism, her memory of her sense of

¹Ibid., 129.

²Ibid., 130.

excitement at finding a conscious feminist movement still carries a fair ring of truth. In any event on her return home from Manchester Cousins "flirted with a secret determination to rouse Ireland on votes for women".³ Feeling that suffragist demonstrations in London "had at last roused some of the Dublin women", on 4 November 1907, Cousins and six women met at the home of Hanna and Francis Sheehy Skeffington to form the Irish Women's Franchise League (IWFL). In Francis Sheehy Skeffington's view, the crucial turning point was the County Council Bill of 1907 which excluded Irish women but not Scottish or English women from seats on County and Borough Councils, a point Cousins apparently forgot.⁴

The aim of the IWFL was to "obtain the parliamentary vote on the same terms as men then had it, or as it might be given to them."⁵ The IWFL took it upon themselves to raise public awareness on the issue of equal suffrage; to obtain pledges from every Irish member of parliament to vote for women suffrage bills introduced in Britain; and to include a

³Ibid., 132.

⁴Francis and Hanna Sheehy Skeffington were well known figures in Dublin Catholic intellectual life. Francis later resigned his post as registrar of University college Dublin in protest at their refusal to admit women students. The Cousins quickly developed a deep and enduring bond with the Sheehy Skeffingtons. All were vegetarians, pacifists and broadly speaking, nationalists, and while they first met at Philosophical Society meetings the Sheehy Skeffingtons did not form part of the Cousins's spiritualist circle, Cliona Murphy, The Women's Suffrage Movement, 30.

⁵Cousins and Cousins, 165.

provision for equal suffrage in any Irish Home Rule Bill. This ginger group of IWFL members then visited the leader of the existing feminist organization, the Irish Women's Suffrage and Local Government Association (IWSLGA), Anna Haslam, "to inform her that we younger women were ready to start a new women's suffrage society on militant lines."⁶ Cousins respected the intent of the by then elderly Anna Haslam, and her husband Thomas, and appreciated the work of the IWSLGA to campaign for women representatives in local government, but found the IWSLGA lacking in the kind of vital energy which had aroused her in Manchester.

Acknowledging the entanglement of the Irish suffrage issue with the national question of Home Rule, the IWFL decided to work out a scheme for a militant suffrage society "suitable to the different political situation of Ireland, as between a subject-country seeking freedom from England, and England, a free country." And Cousins adds, "besides, we had no desire to work under English women leaders."⁷ In telling her story later Cousins made sure that the credit for the

⁶Ibid., 164.

⁷Ibid., 164. The tension between the feminist and nationalist question in Ireland has been well explored by Margaret MacCurtain. See her "Women, the Vote and Revolution" In Women in Irish Society: The Historical Dimension (Greenwood Press, Westport Connecticut, 1983); See also Murphy, The Women's Suffrage Movement; Rosemary Cullen Owens Smashing Times: A History of the Irish Women's Suffrage Movement, 1889-1922 (Dublin: Attic Press, 1984); Margaret Ward, Unmanageable Revolutionaries: Women and Irish Nationalism (Dingle: Brandon Books, 1983).

eventual victory of the Irish suffragists should go to no one but the Irish women themselves: "It was a milestone which... eventually gave the franchise to the women of Ireland even before the British women got it."⁸

The IWFL evidently met a great need amongst Irish women, judging by its remarkably rapid spread throughout the country by 1910. In less than a year membership totalled 700, although by 1912 official memberships leveled off at 800.⁹ While full membership of the IWFL was restricted to women, men were permitted to join as associate members. The IWFL soon became a virtual spearhead to that wing of suffragist groups who favored a more active style of protest, to the extent of causing resentment amongst those suffragist groups who found themselves often in disagreement with its tactics and ideology.¹⁰

As the first treasurer and secretary of the IWFL respectively, Cousins and Hanna Sheehy Skeffington became close comrades in the struggle. The day to day business of running the IWFL involved organizing weekly open-air meetings in Dublin's Phoenix Park and in other sites around the city, organizing national tours by suffragist speakers who traveled around the country in a side-car speaking from ditches and

⁸Ibid., 164.

⁹Murphy, The Women's Suffrage Movement, 32.

¹⁰Ibid., 38.

lorries and camping out in tents at night. Cousins hugely enjoyed the adventurous theatrical element of creating propaganda for the cause, writing letters to the newspapers, and staging pageants of Irish womens' history.¹¹ While a certain amount of teleology and nostalgia inevitably overlays Cousins's autobiographical recollection of her budding as a public feminist, there is no reason to question most of its validity. Listing the personal characteristics which enabled her reformist zeal, Cousins profiled her scout-like zest for challenge:

Danger, the unknown, a test, an examination, a trial, a fight, have always stimulated me and raised my co-efficiency for capacity. The humour that is tucked into every occurrence of circumstance always kept me high above depression. I might flare up, but I didn't sulk.¹²

And then how she was also blessed by:

an extraordinarily robust constitution, ... a "radio-active" energy, and unending natural curiosity... more the curiosity of Eve than the scientist... I always wanted to see over the edge or round the corner of the road, or into other people's houses or minds...I always wanted to

¹¹ Cousins became such a veteran of organizing these meetings in rural towns that on one occasion she helped Patrick Pearse and the Gaelic League find a venue in the hostile "anti-Gaelic" town of Clifden; Cousins and Cousins, 168.

¹²Ibid., 53-54.

change things into better shape.¹³

Looking back, Cousins emphasized her unfailingly fair-minded managerial style and her characteristic full throttle approach to "getting things done:" "I never shirked hard work. I never asked any co-worker to do more or other than I was myself ready to do".

For Cousins the women's cause amply satisfied her desire for apparently impossible challenges:

For each of us the cause was a whole time job, without pay, demanding all kinds of sacrifice, forcing us to do things for which we had no training; pushing us into dreaded and undesired publicity; bringing us ridicule scorn, misrepresentation, but also times of afflatus, of a sense of great blessing, an expansion of capacities, the happiness of great friendships.... It was natural for me to give myself out fully in the service of anything in which I was interested.¹⁴

Cousins always saw the function of the IWFL, whether militant or not, as an educational corrective to the ignorance of the Irish Parliamentary Party (hereafter IPP), and further she was not prepared to wait for a Home Rule government to grant equal suffrage:

¹³Ibid., 53-54.

¹⁴Ibid., 166 and 65.

We had to educate them [the IPP] individually and as a party on the responsibility that they had to Irish women....In Irish politics Home Rule or Union with Britain were the only issues. We women suffragists realized that whatever system of government prevailed, it was a human imperative that women should be included as citizens without delay. We had little power of leverage, but we determined that our cause should be promoted *pari passu* with the current system of Irish political action.¹⁵

The IWFL's perceived position on the national question was a consistently sore point of contention. Cousins put forward her perspective on the nationalist/suffragist issue in a characteristic straightforward style, underlining the suffrage as a fulfillment of the democratic principles of nationalism:

The Irish Women's Franchise League...is not working to wreck Home Rule, as Nationalists believe, but is upholding the demands of all patriots of the past to the right of the people to govern themselves. If we do not see to it that "people" included women as well as men, we are only perpetuating the idea that woman is only property and not a person in her own right....¹⁶

Cousins's career as a public speaker was thrust upon her when at a meeting of the Solicitor's Apprentices Debating Society at the last moment she was forced to stand in for the scheduled speaker, Tom Kettle (an ardent feminist and brother-in-law of Hanna Sheehy Skeffington), and this alongside the

¹⁵Ibid., 169.

¹⁶Votes For Women April 1912, cited in Murphy, The Women's Suffrage Movement, 168.

very well seasoned English Labor feminist, Mabel Gawthorpe.
When the word came that Kettle could not attend:

Providence stepped in and there and then they unanimously decided that I should be the substitute for the brilliant young politician. I was scared to death; but I agreed to do my best, though I had very little time to prepare. There were a thousand people present. Miss Gawthorpes' ability as a speaker was immense. It was my first big test as a speaker. But I survived it.... I remember rehearsing open-air speaking in a field behind our house, with only one ass as my audience. Later I found it easier to speak out of doors than in halls.¹⁷

In the summer of 1909 Cousins worked for three weeks with the WSPU in London, an experience which she looked back on later as "a helpful apprenticeship for our campaign later in Ireland."¹⁸

Returning to Ireland in 1909 Cousins toured Irish towns intermittently over the next two year period. While the IWFL was partially inspired by the example of the WSPU it turned militant only in 1911 when all peaceful lobbying tactics were exhausted. As it became increasingly clear that the suffrage was not a priority for the Irish Parliamentary Party the IWFL stepped up their campaign of heckling its members:

They did not like this, they objected to women butting into their men's way of winning political

¹⁷Ibid., 59 and 166.

¹⁸Cousins and Cousins, 169.

freedom. But the era of dumb, self-effacing women was over.¹⁹

Of the various suffragist groups active in Ireland it was the IWFL who attracted most scorn and abuse for their alleged lack of patriotism. Such charges of unpatriotism forced the IWFL to defend itself against the charge that it was importing its ideology from England. Cousins was forced to defend the principles of the English "suffragette" while at the same time distinguishing English militant suffragist tactics and strategies from those of the IWFL.

Everywhere we explained that the Irish Women's Franchise League was not identical in its militant methods with the English suffragettes. We were not attacking shop-windows; we had no Liberal by-elections, no Cabinet ministers in Ireland. We were as keen as men.²⁰

Aware that the Irish press had "built up a legend" of suffragettes as "wild women", "hooligans," "unsexed females," and the like, Cousins assessed that "it was no wonder that simple newspaper readers in small Irish country towns shrank from the coming into their midst of the unknown quantity, 'the Irish suffragette.'"²¹ The women would set off in pairs, enjoying their sense of shocking celebrity in this "simple

¹⁹Ibid., 185.

²⁰Ibid., 185.

²¹Ibid., 167.

country", where they often experienced difficulty in finding hotel accommodations, venues in which to speak, and presses to print their leaflets. "Irresponsible men" tried to drown their speeches in song, and trick "apple-beds" with the sheets turned backwards awaited them in one hotel. Cousins remembers fondly a Fatherly intervention from "one of the elders of the town {who} chided with 'Can you not give the young girls a chance to spake?'"²²

The attempt of the IWFL to define its Irish national identity from the WSPU was a delicate affair. While solidarity with the WSPU was important to the IWFL, the WSPU's reputation for militance also functioned as a threatening example of the kind of havoc which the IWFL could wreak if such "foreign" tactics were domesticated. Apart from the internationalist principles of the IWFL it also had to reciprocate the hospitality of visiting WSPU organizers if only because there were deputations of Irish women visiting London for suffragist demonstrations, as well as the permanent Irish women's community in England. Cousins was the chief diplomatic intermediary between the IWFL and the WSPU as she oversaw the Pankhursts' speaking tours of Ireland.²³ Cousins's

²²Ibid., 167.

²³ It was also Cousins who supervised the maneuvers of Irish suffragist troops to London, writing the following in Votes for Women, 1913. "We shall certainly send you some representatives - at least six; but in view of the fact that a great deal of local militant work will have to be done at the time of the National Convention, several of our members who cannot face imprisonment twice will have to be reserved

theosophical, internationalist tolerance eased her role as a sort of official liaison officer of Anglo-Irish suffragist relations. The boundaries of invasion still needed however to be publicly staged. In October 1910 while seated on the Cork platform beside Mrs Pankhurst, Cousins drew the line demarcating the limit of English suffragist interference in the Irish movement. Cousins followed Pankhurst back to London as part of an Irish corps of protest at the omission of the suffrage issue from the Liberal party's election manifesto. Cousins immediately volunteered:

There and then I rose from my seat and volunteered for militant action knowing it would result in my imprisonment. I knew that if I discussed my decision with relatives or friends they would feel duty bound to save me from suffering. It was my own urge, my own responsibility, and, I felt, my own privilege. At any rate my plan of action worked. No one put any obstacle in my way to going to London.²⁴

On November 18, 1910 Cousins accompanied five Irish women to participate in the "Parliament of Women" at Caxton Hall, Westminster. Altogether four hundred women gathered to march in groups of twelve to interview the Prime Minister, each carrying a copy of the suffragist resolution and each wearing the suffragist sash saying "Votes for Women." In the

for the latter occasion. But we are arranging every one of our Irish contingent that we send over will be prepared to go to prison as we have sent before." Cousins, Votes for Women, 31 May 1913, cited in Murphy, 92.

²⁴Cousins and Cousins, 101.

procession Cousins "felt deeply the high privilege of a place in history." The police had been ordered not to arrest the women but to "put them out of action."²⁵ Over a hundred women were arrested and fifty injured. Indignant at the treatment given to the women, the leaders called for a second deputation for the following day. Cousins's recalls being "opposed by solid phalanxes of policemen who forced us back out of Downing Street. The spirit of the women was epic."²⁶ The experiences of those few days marked a turning point in a more radically physical form of militancy for Cousins, as it did for many of her comrades. She was then further emboldened to join in the breaking of the windows of Cabinet Ministers' homes - windows which in Cousins' view were: "the property of tax-payers of whom thousands were women."²⁷

Cousins along with other members of both the IWFL and WSPU set out for the Chelsea house of Chief Secretary for Ireland, Augustine Birrell, carrying potatoes in their muffs and pockets as missiles. With neither policemen or witnesses in sight they broke every window within reach. Then something of an anti-climax set in: "there was nothing to be done but to return as free as we came."²⁸ Meeting back with their other colleagues they discovered that over two hundred of the women

²⁵Cousins and Cousins, 176.

²⁶Ibid., 177.

²⁷Ibid., 178.

²⁸Ibid., 178.

who had also broken government glass had been arrested, but that the windows of Asquith and Lloyd George remained intact as Downing Street was too well guarded. As the Irish members had not yet been arrested they were detailed for Downing Street.²⁹ Having been escorted in small groups by some male supporters to the corner of Downing Street on what Cousins remembers as "an uncanny night... Mrs Garvey Kelly and I had to call all our courage to our aid."³⁰ Because they were staying in central London, the only missiles they had been able to find were flower-pots which they broke for the task.

In the heavy silent fog we reached the official residences without meeting anyone. Then we heard the crash of glass from a preceding group. Immediately there came the shrilling of a police whistle. I flung my pieces of pottery, which I had in my muff, up at the windows, and heard the result of the impact. Suddenly I felt nothing but the instinct of self preservation, and dashed across the street to be lost in the fog and avoid being caught. But on the opposite footpath I came to my senses and realized that I was deserting my comrades. I felt again in the muff and found a couple more pieces of flower pot. I dashed to Lloyd Georges' residence, and as I threw my last pieces a policeman actually asked me excitedly, "Will you stop here while I catch her?" I laughed heartily and gave the required assurance to the poor man. But I was relieved when we were safely in his care. The policemen of the Westminster district were gentlemen compared with the bullies from the East

²⁹ Marjorie Hasler comments on the police assault on Black Friday; "I gathered from him [a policeman] that they had orders to illuse us but not to arrest, and I subsequently learned that the Government was particularly anxious that no Irishwoman should be arrested." Marjorie Hasler, "Black Friday Scenes", Irish Citizen, 19 April 1913.

³⁰ Couins and Cousins, 179.

End that Winston Churchill had turned on us at Westminster.³¹

After her arrest, Cousins found the entire trial and remand system exhausting and tension-ridden although she experienced something of a "resurrection" the morning after the trial in which she was sentenced to a month's imprisonment in Holloway Jail. She was troubled by the length of the sentence as she had not expected to be away from home for more than two weeks. Entering the Black Maria van and being driven in it through the streets of London was what she calls her next "queer experience."

Other women had been repelled by the narrow locked compartments in that terrifying prison van that had conveyed many a queer character to doom; but it did not upset me. My fellow prisoners were a cheerful lot, and we sang songs like "John Brown's Body" and the "Women's March". At last we were inside the great gates of Holloway, the largest women's prison in Great Britain....My memories of that month sum themselves as a species of living death because of the solitariness of the confinement.³²

Cousins's greatest trial in prison was not knowing the time of day as her watch was taken from her, and as she was not in earshot of bells or clocks, the three meals pushed through a cell aperture were her only means of measuring the time of day. As the cells were overheated from water pipes, the women

³¹Ibid., 179.

³²Ibid., 180.

broke the windows with the heels of their shoes for ventilation. Cousins spent her time reading "improving books" such as Buck's "Cosmic Consciousness", Swedenborg's "Heaven and Hell", all of the works of the Indian spiritual and social reformer Swami Vivekenanda, Anna Kingsford, and More's "Utopia". Her only interaction with her comrades was confined to the daily church service although no conversation was possible. For daily exercise prisoners were allowed to walk around the prison yard behind one another in total silence. This stint in Holloway jail sparked Cousins's life-long interest in prison reform and philosophies of punishment.³³ Released on 23 December 1910, with about forty other "one-monthers" Cousins poignantly remembered arriving home on Christmas Eve to be greeted by a reception committee and torchlight procession which paraded her through the streets of the capital. Cousins was especially moved by the idea of herself being inducted into the tradition of Irish freedom fighters: "It was a stirring and unexpected experience for me to be a figure in such a traditional demonstration, the old staging for a new aspect of the age-long struggle for freedom,

³³Cousins tells how "the whole of Holloway jail was fitted with wire mesh between its storeys and up and down the stairways, a painful reminder of the number of prisoners whom the prison system had driven to such insanity that they had tried to commit suicide. I was fully convinced that such imprisonment as the supposed civilized Government was giving to women was stupid and cruel, and useless as a way of suppressing their agitation, and was only wasting time. But much water was to run under the Westminster Bridge before so-called statesmen changed their ways." Ibid., 181.

unique in Irish political history in having women at its centre."³⁴

In 1912 When Asquith came to Dublin to promote the Liberals' Home Rule Bill at a meeting in Dublin's Theatre Royal, he was inevitably the target of suffragist condemnation because of his neglect of the suffrage issue. The organizers, frightened of suffragist demonstration, banned any women from entering the meeting. Francis Sheehy Skeffington disguised himself as a Protestant clergyman to heckle Asquith on votes for women. To coincide with Asquith's meeting the IWFL arranged an open-air meeting near the Theatre Royal which was attacked, according to Cousins, by "low-class women...with hat-pins as weapons" and "poor-class Youths" who threw stones at the speakers and tried to push the lorry out of place. The suffragists, including Cousins, were quickly escorted by police on to the nearest tram and whisked away to the end of the line as the tram windows were being smashed.³⁵

³⁴Ibid., 182. James Cousins wrote in to a newspaper correcting the reports of bawdiness and of the catch cries "Down with Women", heard in the awaiting crowd, pointing out that a poor flower seller threw a bunch of violets and that there was "much chivalry and influential figures of Irish literary, political and social life in the crowd of considerably greater significance than even a Christmas Eve mob of mischievous boys" and that there was a fife and drum band, Trinity College gowned graduates, and flags and banners, accompanied by forty men and sergeants of B Division under Chief Superintendent Whitaker and Inspector Flynn; unidentified newspaper clipping, n.d., Suffrage Exhibition Papers, Ms 21,651, National Library of Ireland.

³⁵Ibid., 188. The last eighteen months or so of Cousins's years in Ireland before her departure to India coincided with the most heated phase of suffragist activity

However when the second reading of the Liberal Home Rule Bill was about to pass in 1913, still with no mention of votes for women, Cousins and her colleagues felt the need of some "extreme militant action which would assure world-wide publicity of our protest:"

Three of us volunteered to break the windows of Dublin castle, the official seat of English domination. That sound of breaking glass on January 28, 1913 reverberated round the world and is what we wanted. It told the world that Irish women protested against an imperfect and undemocratic Home Rule bill.³⁶

With Mrs Connery, a firebrand stalwart of the IWFL, and Mrs Hoskins each carrying an umbrella weighted with lead, Cousins began breaking the windows in the Prisons' Board offices and State apartments of Dublin Castle. They hammered the windows

which is best documented in the Irish Citizen, the organ of the IWFL founded in 1912. The Irish Citizen was edited by Francis Sheehy

Skeffington and James Cousins and both Margaret Cousins and Hanna Sheehy Skeffington contributed regularly; Apparently Cousins was also assaulted judging by a report in the Irish Citizen: "A man who was guilty of an assault on Mrs Cousins, which differed in no respect from the throwing of a hatchet at Mr Asquith, was let off with a fine of 20 shillings or fourteen days imprisonment. We hear a great deal about what the hatchet-thrower 'might' have done had she succeeded in her aim, this man Reilly 'might' have knocked out Mrs Cousins' eye and fourteen days, with the option of a fine, is considered enough punishment. It is a quarter of a sentence on the first batch of Irish militants; and one twelfth of that imposed on the second batch, who did not even get the option of a fine." Irish Citizen 10 August 1912.

³⁶Ibid., 189.

with the umbrellas, and continued breaking them until they were arrested, having broken about twenty in all. "We were the first women prisoners on behalf of women's demands for their sex in a Home Rule setting. It was something new to Ireland." The three were promptly arrested and brought up on charges. The police court was crammed for the trial. Although the damage to the windows amounted to a mere five shillings each, they were sentenced to a month's imprisonment with hard labor as "common criminals." The three demanded to be treated as political prisoners, a classification which Cousins felt "had been won by men in the Land League and Home Rule clashes with the English Government," and announced that they were prepared to wait a week for the classification to be changed and if not would begin a hunger strike in protest "as the only form of protest in our power."³⁷

During the trial Cousins stressed that she and her colleagues were not "hooligans" but political grievants. The punchy verbal courtroom exchanges scarcely required editing such was the entertainment value they provided for the press. The moral tone of her courtroom rhetoric here is also interestingly reminiscent of the northern unionist position in 1912:

Mrs Cousins addressed his worship and maintained that they did not stand there as ordinary criminals. Nothing but the treachery of the

³⁷Ibid., 190.

Government in connection with the dropping of the Reform bill, and especially their treatment of Irish women, would have brought them into that court. What she had done she had not done directly for herself, but for hundreds of fellow Irishwomen, who felt the flush of shame at the way they were duped and betrayed by the Government. She quoted a speech by Mr Birrell to establish that womens' interests had been betrayed. By their actions last night, she said, the Government had disenfranchised and taken away all chance of Irishwomen being enfranchised for, perhaps numbers of years. If she had broken a window of a house on fire she would be considered a heroine, and in breaking the window in the castle she was saving far more than a child, because she was working for countless women throughout the land. They did not deny they broke the windows, and in fact it was the greatest honor she could have to make such a protest against the disgraceful conduct of the government. "We acknowledge we did wrong" she added, "but we do not consider we are guilty of a moral offence."³⁸

Cousins said they would post no bail for their future behavior and requested that in the event of their being sent to prison, that they should be made first class misdemeanants, which matter was to be decided by the Prison's Board.

The judge remarked on how he had had many cases of window smashing, but he had never the misfortune of having suffragists before him. He had very strong opinions as to people taking the law into their own hands, and although these ladies said they were outside the law, yet the law protected them. Women had come before him who had a thousand times more reason for window breaking than the women in the dock. That was not a court of politics but a court of law and he could not draw a distinction between one class of prisoner and another. This sort of disorder could not be allowed to go on. It was intolerable that ladies who broke glass in this wanton manner should then come and

³⁸ Irish Times 29 January 1913.

ask for favours. He had nothing to do with their treatment in prison, and he sent each of the prisoners to one month's imprisonment with hard labor.³⁹

Cousins recalled her first night in Dublin's Mountjoy jail:

We touched depths in Mountjoy Prison in Dublin the first night of our sentence. The prison authorities were not prepared for us. We refused to be searched. We would not take off our clothes. We were separated in different cells. It was bitterly cold and there was no heating. Much tension and nervous strain had made me so tired that a final tussle with the jail authorities, because I would not give my thumb impression, exhausted me, and I had to lie down on the plank bed. It was horribly hard and hurt me. But that was a lesser trial than the sickening, disgusting smell from a grey blanket that had evidently been used by former unwashed prisoners. In utter loneliness, with no possibility of help or relief, shivering with cold, I was compelled to pull the blanket over me; and sleep through the raw winter night conquered by nausea that gave me oblivion till morning.⁴⁰

Next morning the three were taken to Tullamore jail in the midlands, a move possibly designed to remove them from the limelight of the capital. It was later justified on the basis that prison regulation for women prisoners could be more

³⁹ Irish Times 29 January 1913. A letter signed "Justice" in the Freeman's Journal commented that the women were let off lightly compared with the sentence meted out to a young man who broke the windows of the Salvation Army barracks "actuated no doubt by excessive religious zeal or fanaticism...But, as a Police Magistrate once said to me, 'there is one law for the rich and another for the poor.'" Freeman's Journal 26 June 1912.

⁴⁰ Ibid., 189.

easily relaxed there. In subsequent newspaper articles Cousins made the most of the symbolism of the fortress-like architecture of Tullamore jail:

Those who selected Tullamore jail as the abode of the Suffragettes had an unerring sense of the fitness of the scenery to the drama. The buildings are massive, ponderous, picturesque, handsome. Their feudal appearance and atmosphere form a symbolic setting for the women's cause. We were the representatives of the last serfs. Even niggers and kaffirs have been freed and enfranchised before women. Therefore, this grimness and these grey, castellated walls were in keeping with the masculine spirit of force which tries to imprison the spirit of growing freedom and self-reliant individualism which has awakened in women. "Shut them up in a tower and make them do just as we choose", say the feudal lords of creation. But they reckon without their hosts, or rather their guests. We would not acquiesce in the status imposed on us of common hard labor criminals. The railway crowd had at once recognised us as political prisoners; we determined the authorities also should.⁴¹

"The railway crowd" was a group of station porters, newsboys and onlookers who formed a procession of sympathy behind the prisoners and the police escort, and cheered as they entered its "fear-evoking gate." Cousins inserted her agitation into a national past rather interestingly. In the classic parameters of the modern democratic revolution she invoked the will of the crowd as the pure conscience of the nation who could validate the struggle for freedom, but in turn she also marked its "traditional" chivalric appreciation for the

⁴¹Cousins, "In Tullamore Jail: A Prisoner's Story," The Irish Independent, 28 February 1913.

woman's show of love for the nation:

The incident was significant of the immediate alignment of the unsophisticated Irish mind with anyone agitating for any kind of freedom, and the inherent chivalry of the unspoiled Irish people towards women, especially women patriots.⁴²

While Cousins's crass specification of "even" "niggers and kaffirs" as historical fellow victims of an outdated feudal hierarchy was deliberately designed to provoke anger at the imperial structures of racial and sexual discrimination which informed that feudal hierarchy, she suggests that women should have been given the vote before those "other" populations.

In any event conditions in Tullamore were an improvement on Mountjoy. The women were allowed a fire, an iron bedstead, clean, warm bed-clothes, a chair, a table, a writing slate and pencil, their own clothes, some "moral books, eatable food of a poor kind, and the right of association in labor and exercise". Cousins also reformed the prison diet by insisting on the option of vegetarian meals.⁴³ The major point of

⁴²Ibid., 189-190.

⁴³Cousins also demonstrated her somewhat Pearsian ahimsa with imprisoned fleas as fellow colonial subjects of a greater power by rescuing one from a death of hypothermia; "Something in me reflected that the flea had its place in the universe, though its purpose and actions did not appear to be quite friendly to ours. Some power as far beyond me as I was beyond the flea might conceivably throw me out in the snow on its window sill if I did not serve its purpose. I searched for the flea in the snow, found it apparently dead,

contention between Cousins and the jail authorities was the issue of whether the suffragists should be officially granted political status.⁴⁴ The prisoners every day chalked "NO SURRENDER" on their cell door slates and on their uniform sleeves. Petitions to the Lord Lieutenant organized by suffragist colleagues outside met with no success. After one week, the women now numbering four having since been joined by Mrs Purser, who had committed a separate offence in Dublin, decided to carry through their threat of hunger-strike. Typically Cousins found in the experience a spiritual silver lining. "Indeed I found all of my powers of reading and understanding enhanced. I felt refined and purified, and I had a keen realisation of the Unity of Life and my own oneness with it."⁴⁵

but held it in my palm in front of the fire. In a few minutes the heat apparently resuscitated it, for it jumped out of sight and I never saw or felt it afterwards." Cousins and Cousins, 192; And for details of prison conditions see Murphy, 97; and J. Boland, Governor of Tullamore, to General Prisons' Board, 1 March 1913, General Prisons' Board: Suffragette Papers and Files c.1913-1914, National Archives, Dublin, (hereafter referred to as GPB papers).

⁴⁴Cousins to Boland, 28 January 1913, GPB papers.

⁴⁵Cousins and Cousins, 191; It is also interesting that a report by "L.L.D" in the Irish Citizen linked the Irish suffragists' hunger striking to a tradition of fasting as a quasi -legal remedy from the "Senchus Mor" - an ancient code of Gaelic Brehon law which, according to the author, was itself derived from "Aryan custom" and was "widely diffused" throughout the East and "termed 'Sitting Dharna' by the Hindoos.... "It is surely curious to consider the antiquity and the world-wide extension of this practice of fasting as a quasi-legal remedy, which, when it suddenly broke out in

The General Prisons' Board, although anxious to ward off a protracted hunger strike, argued that there was no legal provision for the recognition of the political status of the prisoners. Although under the Prison Rules some ameliorations could be granted to certain classes of prisoners - irrespective of whether their motives had been connected with politics or not - these ameliorations were expressly confined to prisoners sentenced to imprisonment without Hard Labor and therefore could not be applied to the suffragists.⁴⁶ The warder however, anxious to terminate the hunger strike, postured as if to concede by asking the prisoners to specify the exact privileges for which they were applying, assuring them that "no time would be lost in obtaining a decision." The women asked to be allowed to write and receive one letter per day; to be visited twice daily by their friends; to have their own food sent in; to be allowed newspapers; to do their own needlework and to be exempted from Hard Labor.⁴⁷ After one week Mrs Hoskins collapsed and was released by order of the Lord Lieutenant. And on that same evening, as she reported later in

Mountjoy prison, was looked on by most as a new phenomenon, or at least as a mere importation from England; to which, however, it appears to have travelled from Russia, having its basis far away in India." L.L.D., "Suffragettes Fasting in Prison," The Irish Citizen 12 October 1913.

⁴⁶A.F. Owen Lewis to Chairman of General Prisons' Board, 9 February 1913, GPB papers.

⁴⁷The warder reported that "the attitude of Mrs Cousins and Mrs Purser was most polite and amenable, but Mrs Connery was very intractable;" A.F. Owen Lewis to Chairman of General Prisons' Board, 9 February 1913, GPB papers.

the Freeman's Journal, "'one of the officials came down and offered us our terms if we gave up the strike - the Government,' she grinned, 'had caved in.'"⁴⁸ On their release the suffragists publicized the bargain with the prison authorities to prove that they had won "full political privileges." "We feel very pleased" Mrs Connery stated, "that we have been the means of winning political privileges for women as well as men in the future."⁴⁹ "It was a great pleasure to us to be able to spend the latter part of our term as first-class misdemeanants with the enjoyment of full political privileges."⁵⁰ On the very morning of their release the governor of Tullamore wrote an anxious note to Dublin Castle hoping to beat Margaret Cousins to it:

I am just after discharging the two Special Prisoners. They appear to be in bad form going out. Last night Mrs Cousins sent for me to hang up first class misdemeanants cards in their cells. I think her object was to get some information as to the treatment of this class of prisoners with a view to the article she is to write for the papers. I told her I could not put such cards in their cells. She pretends to think that the prisoners were treated as first class misdemeanants and appears to be disappointed to hear now they were not. She told me this morning that she will go to see the Chairman about the matter as soon as she can today. I am sending this letter by the 9.8 a.m train in the hope that it will reach you before Mrs Cousins.

⁴⁸ Cousins, "Prison Experience of Dublin Suffragettes," Freeman's Journal 28 February 1913.

⁴⁹ Meg Connery, Evening Herald, 27 February 1913.

⁵⁰ Cousins, "Prison Experiences of Dublin Suffragettes" Freeman's Journal 28 February, 1913.

There was nothing written about 1st class misdemeanants' treatment on the slate where they enumerated the privileges they wanted for the inspector. I enclose you the slate to see. I kept it locked up since. The privileges are enumerated on side marked A with blue pencil... P.S. All the writing on the slate is just the same as it was when handed to the Inspector.⁵¹

The prison authorities however had discretely muffled the rules to accommodate the women's demands in order to silence them without in fact changing their official classification. Whether or not the prisoners genuinely believed that they had won the status of first class misdemeanants which, in legal terms they never did, is a tricky point, but one which reveals some slippage between the women, the warder, the Prison's Board in Dublin, the Lord Lieutenant, the press, and public opinion in Ireland, England and internationally. Because Cousins and her colleagues were articulate, intelligent and socially well connected, they were regarded as "a new class" of prisoner so that prison officials kept a careful file on press reports and parliamentary debates on the issue of militant prisoners and of how they were being seen to be

⁵¹ Although the Chief Secretary Birrell, said there was "no such thing as a category of 'political prisoners' in law or in prison regulations"; extract from parliamentary debates, GPB 11 February 1913. In a letter to the IWFL the Governor stated that the "prison authorities, with the sanction of his excellency, have offered these prisoners privileges which are not allowed to ordinary convicts. Inter alia they may wear their own clothes, remain in association part from other convicts, and obtain food other than the ordinary prison fare." GPB Papers, 3 Sept 1913.

treated by the prison system.⁵² This dependency of the Prison's Board on public opinion, and on the parliamentary response to the issue at Westminster, partially accounts for the studied coyness as well for the sensitivity with which the Prisons' Board generally responded to the demands of the suffragists. One product of this circulation of power was the Temporary Discharge of Ill Health Act, or the "Cat and Mouse Act" as it was more popularly called, which was introduced in 1913 to diffuse the public ramifications of the militants' hunger-striking. This meant simply that striking women who were close to serious illness were released for a period of recuperation after which they were returned to jail to complete their sentences. In Ireland, as in England, the act was greeted with vehement protest. Cousins argued that such "kindness" was in fact "a more insidious form of barbarism." By allowing the prison authorities to control the public outcry the act effectively frustrated the militants' power to expand their base of public sympathy. The dilemma of the authorities was thus solved as they were seen to punish the troublemakers while at the same time they could be publicly applauded for their humane, if patronizing handling of the situation.

In the autobiography Cousins attributed the delay in changing the classification to:

⁵²GPB papers, Suffragettes File.

the density of the ordinary political mind that could not appreciate principles, or if it privately saw them would not act on them until women were compelled to follow the historical ways of men and take to actions that were unnatural and repugnant to them....⁵³

The chivalrous and "unsophisticated Irish mind" which Cousins had earlier counted on to support naturally every sign of rebellion, was now quickly replaced by the "density of the ordinary political mind" which could not appreciate principles, or worse still, if it did, it lacked the spine to follow through on them, thereby scandalously abandoning the woman patriot and leaving her with no resource except to appropriate what was for her "unnatural" positions of masculine subversion.⁵⁴

In a prompt newspaper article on her experiences in jail Cousins also applauded the Irish chivalric nature again, reporting that she "felt very well pleased that Ireland had come through its test so humanely and had not stained its history, as England had stained hers, by forcibly feeding

⁵³Cousins and Cousins, 194,

⁵⁴Cousins's brother Alfred had been an ardent opponent of the suffragettes when he was a student in Newcastle-on-Tyne and upset a meeting of Christabel Pankhurst by burning red pepper in the hall. Yet later, as Cousins recorded in We Two Together, he wrote to his sister in jail: "Your imprisonment has created more interest and discussion than anything done for woman suffrage so far in Ireland. The whole things has been a great success and you and your comrades are indeed to be congratulated on doing your part so nobly." Ibid., 193. Later Alfred organized a suffrage tour of towns in County Cork where he was working as an engineer.

suffrage prisoners."⁵⁵ Cousins demonstrated her alertness to the leverage which international opinion could work on the subject of Irish nationalism as she situated her suffragist struggle in that context:

I felt very privileged in being in the historic line of the political prisoners of Ireland who fought for proper status, I could not sell the pass they had won.⁵⁶

However, here as elsewhere, Cousins's attempt to ingratiate her own position to "the nationalist tradition" sat alongside her rhetorical efforts to flatter and shame "the nationalist consciousness" into suffragist sympathy. For instance, as a method of ensuring the continuing good will of chivalric Irish male authorities, and to win a general patriotic favor, she emphasized in a later newspaper account of the prison term, how the Irish superintendent and warders "were all human. We

⁵⁵Ibid., 194. Although in Cousins's case the issue of force-feeding never arose, it did arise subsequently when two English WSPU suffragists, Mrs Leigh and Miss Evans, were force-fed in an Irish jail where they were held for throwing a hatchet at Asquith in Dublin. Although Irish suffragist prisoners hunger struck in sympathy with their English comrades, prison authorities stopped short at force-feeding them. The force-feeding of the two WSPU women was justified apparently on the basis of their non-Irishness. In Votes For Women, it was argued that this was because public opinion was "more enlightened" in Ireland than in England; that the "violence and brutality of the process is revolting to the Irish mind." Anon., Votes For Women 23 August 1912.

⁵⁶Ibid., 191.

were addressed by our names, not by numbers as in Holloway."⁵⁷ After her release Cousins wrote to thank the Governor for his courtesy during her month of imprisonment and she included his response in her autobiography over thirty years later:

My duty here with you and fellow prisoners was made very light indeed by the kindly consideration and good sense you have always shown towards myself and the other officials in the discharge of our duties. You will, I am sure, be very busy preparing for your departure from this country. I am not writing words of empty flattery when I say the cause you have so much at heart will lose by your departure a lady and a leader of more than the ordinary ability and tact, whose place it will not be easy to fill with a person of equal qualifications.⁵⁸

Cousins deliberately used a kind of school mistress tone in her advice to the prison authorities on how to run the prison. After Cousins release, for example, with fellow prisoner Mrs Purser still in jail, Cousins was still campaigning for Purser to get a first class misdemeanor card in her cell, such as her comrades in Mountjoy had. Cousins deliberately cast her appeal in a no-nonsense, authoritative, executive tone:

It will be utterly illogical to refuse the card itself, and I feel I have only to put the matter before you to have it amended. I would therefore appeal to you on behalf of Mrs Purser, who is in a state of great anxiety on this count, to wire

⁵⁷Cousins and Cousins, 189.

⁵⁸Ibid., 212.

instructions to the Governor tomorrow to give Mrs Purser the card at once as the matter is very urgent.⁵⁹

In Tullamore Cousins and her colleagues took every opportunity of reforming prison rules to distinguish their honorable status from ordinary criminals. The suffragists had been granted the special privilege of meeting their visitors in the Governor's office. However when visitors arrived unannounced they were brought to the regular visiting room. The suffragists then refused to see the visitors there, without, as the frustrated Governor later reported to Dublin, providing their waiting visitors with any explanation. The Governor also shrewdly noted in his report that "the protest of the prisoners is due in most part to what they see in the daily papers about the conditions under which ordinary visits are given." Cousins argued that it was "degrading to our sense of honorable dealing to be made stand in a species of wire cage with a space left between us and our equally honourable friends, to be prevented from even shaking hands with them, and to have to converse with them under such inferences of deceit and criminality."⁶⁰

To Cousins, the style and image of her operation was as important as the result - the medium was very often the

⁵⁹Cousins to Chairman of General Prison's Board, 27 February 1913, GPB papers.

⁶⁰Cousins to Chairman of General Prisons' Board, n.d. GPB papers.

message. She was also however well able to adopt several personas and to switch effortlessly between them depending on what it was she felt that needed reform. Cousins functioned as a judge of the culture which had jailed her rather than the other way around. Her sociology of the jail, written to the press "from the inside out," actually gave the insider a piece of the "woman-as-outsider's" mind. Her article in the Irish Independent concluded that: "In its present form it is thoroughly unsatisfactory and utterly fails in its objects. It neither reforms nor deters, and it undoubtedly will have to be smashed up and itself be reformed in the rapidly approaching future."⁶¹ In a crucially important passage in the Irish Citizen Cousins explained how the suffragists had managed their imprisonment to the advantage of the cause of social evolution and in the process exposed the nakedness of the "Emperor's Law:"

but we suffragettes were standing at the helm of the ship of human liberty; and we use the tide of the law to serve our own purpose. Thus since we first challenged the law we have exposed its powerlessness to coerce us; we have made its authority a farce; we have injured the prestige of the government which puts in motion old laws to imprison us, instead of new laws to free us. Last month once again, after those Dublin magistrates had given their sentences, we took the helm in our own hands, steered the ship in the exact direction we had on our charts, and started to sentence everyone around us...Thus the power of the human will, working on a basis of reason and justice,

⁶¹Cousins, "The Prison System Viewed from the Inside," Irish Daily Independent 11 March 1913.

proved that it could break through a harsh and unjust "hard labor" precedent, could fix the length of its own imprisonment, could obtain its own release, could face death or torture, could turn that sentence to its own service, through making it a rest for body, mind and soul, could use it for the service of all future reformers, and could make it a source of fresh inspiration and courage in our own work. We know that we are above the law and that in submitting to it according to the terms we ourselves impose on it, we are in a far-off way following the example of that supreme crucified one who came not to destroy the law but to fulfil it; that we suffer but to redeem, and that indeed we are co-workers with him for the upliftment of our people.⁶²

In forcing the legal system to expose its mistreatment of the women Cousins believed she was steering the judicial system back toward the natural law from which it had veered off course. Cousins's deliberate violation of the actual law was designed to redirect civilization to its original, more enlightened spiritual purpose. Cousins's casting of her misdemeanor as a Christian act of self-sacrifice was appropriate to her eternal feeling of being personally on the brink of ushering in a brilliant new awakened age of enlightened sexual politics. Moreover by banishing the merest hint of doubt, Cousins's confidently bounding positivist rhetoric had the effect of reassuring both her colleagues and herself of the value of their investment. For Cousins the suffragist cause, at that point, justified her life.

⁶²Cousins, The Irish Citizen, 8 March 1913.

The last eighteen months or so of Cousins's years in Ireland, coincided with the most heated phase of Irish suffragist activity. This phase is best documented in the Irish Citizen. At one point Cousins was physically assaulted:

A man who was guilty of an assault on Mrs Cousins, which differed in no respect from the throwing of a hatchet at Mr Asquith, was let off with a fine of twenty shillings of fourteen days imprisonment. We hear a great deal about what the hatchet-thrower 'might' have done had she succeeded in her aim, this man, Reilly, might have knocked out Mrs Cousins' eye and fourteen days, with the option of a fine, is considered enough punishment. It is a quarter of a sentence on the first batch of Irish militants; and one twelfth of that imposed on the second batch, who did not even get the option of a fine."⁶³

This article may have come in response to a letter signed by "Justice" in the Freeman's Journal one month earlier. "Justice" commented that the women were let off lightly compared with the sentence meted out to a young man who broke the windows of the Salvation Army barracks - "actuated" as "Justice" wrote:

no doubt by excessive religious zeal or fanaticism...But, as a Police Magistrate once said to me, "there is one law for the rich and another for the poor."⁶⁴

⁶³Irish Citizen 10 August 1912.

⁶⁴Freeman's Journal 26 June 1912.

It is also curious that a report by "L.L.D" in the Irish Citizen linked the suffragists' hunger-striking to a tradition of fasting as a quasi-legal remedy from the "Senchus Mor" - an ancient code of Irish Brehon law which was itself derived from "Aryan custom" and was "widely diffused" throughout the East and -

termed 'Sitting Dharna' by the Hindoos...it is surely curious to consider the antiquity and the world-wide extension of this practice of fasting as a quasi-legal remedy, when it suddenly broke out in Mountjoy prison was looked on by most as a new phenomenon, or at least as a mere importation from England; to which, however, it appears to have travelled from Russia, having its basis far away in India.⁶⁵

What calls for explanation then is not why Cousins was not more radical, nor is it an explanation of what ideologies blocked her vision, as though her "native" vision was somehow pure, innocent and ideologically transcendent but rather but rather what is called for is a consideration and an illustration in the specificity of her history of how her ideology was formed and constantly transformed by changing conditions and context. The fact that Cousins travelled all over the world so much, back and forth, all the time, makes her case especially interesting as well as frustratingly magnificent when it comes to applying analytic frameworks and

⁶⁵Irish Citizen 12 October 1913.

historiographical categories.

If Cousins's feminism was partially inspired and produced by a nationalist context she also appropriated it to her own short term ends. Cousins's politicization as a feminist was not swallowed whole from nationalist notions anymore than nationalism escaped in a vacuum untouched by Irish feminist history. In Cousins' case, nationalist ideas of woman, as well as feminist ideas of the nation co-produced her as a political figure, as an agent, just as she transformed the context of cultural nationalism by participating in it as a feminist.

In review, Cousins wished for an expansion of the public political sphere to include certain "high-minded" women in furtherance of her larger dream of spiritual sexual evolution. In this she was quite willing to defer the dismantlement of hierarchical structures of class, in Ireland as well as everywhere else. In fact much of her ideology implicitly (and even occasionally explicitly) reinforces the prevailing class structure even if explicitly and rhetorically she was not an advocate of class inequality. It is far from clear that Cousins saw Irish national independence as an imperative in this process, although she sympathized in theory with the nationalist project (more strongly, however, and significantly from her later years in India than when she was in Dublin or Liverpool).

Cousins's vision of a reformed and utopian modern world

was strongly nuanced, if not wholly informed by a "return" to aristocratic, feudal codes of intersexual and interclass respect, and to a system of distributing power in which ideals of democracy and national freedom were marginalized in favor of a focus on the actual well being of women in Irish society.

CHAPTER 3

DUBLIN TO LIVERPOOL

It comes therefore as something of a shock that by May of 1913, a little over one year after her release from Tullamore jail, that Cousins should leave Ireland to live near Liverpool. In common with most other emigrants from Ireland the reason for the Cousins's departure on 2 June 1913 owed something to harsh economic realities. The Cousinses' income from the outset was meager - but then their priorities were artistic and spiritual rather than material. They managed on James's pay as clerk in the Dublin coal and shipping office and later James became a geography teacher in the Dublin High School, a largely Protestant feeder institution for Trinity College, and Margaret gave occasional piano lessons:

We were very Irish about money...Our wedding outfits would keep us in clothes for two years. Our furniture we would pay for in the hire-purchase system. Wedding presents would help considerably and my Father's wedding cheque would buy a piano...How simple it seemed and how simply it worked out. Our desires for objects kept within the cash we could depend on. "Miracles" happened now and then, and what they brought we quickly spent in "extras", such as our first trip to London together, the same to Paris and Normandy, and so on

in ever-widening range.¹

In 1912 Hugh Mapleton, an English vegetarian foods entrepreneur in Dublin offered James Cousins a nine month training stint in his vegetarian foods company in the town of Garston, near Liverpool, with the view of sending him from there to open a branch in Bombay. After what James Cousins describes as a "cool consideration of all the circumstances of our life together" they both decided to accept the invitation.

² As James Cousins was feeling increasingly restless in his teaching post at the protestant Dublin High School, he had aspirations for a position more befitting what he imagined as his consistently under recognized literary talent, and for a better salary.³ James Cousins also felt that the "green tint" in his writing, combined with his suffragism and socialism, hardly endeared him toward the Protestant and Unionist leaning institution. What is more likely however is that his strange Theosophical viewpoints might have marked him out as an odd

¹Cousins and Cousins, 98.

²Ibid., 215.

³ As James Cousins put it: "Economically I was in a cleft stick. My school salary was fixed. My expenses were growing. My reputation was gratifying; but the reputations that led to income were attached to parties or organizations, and I was not of the kind that could be partitioned or roped in, though I almost became one of AE's agricultural demonstrators." Cousins and Cousins, 135. "AE" (George Russell) was the leader of the Irish Agricultural Organisers' Society, led by Horace Plunkett, which aimed to modernize and regenerate Irish agriculture.

ball in many circles.⁴

Further, a financial issue which was still unresolved until 1914, was the Cousinses' bankruptcy, which befell them in 1907. James Cousins was invited to become a director of a new co-operative bank by an Englishman, W.H. Sanderson, who came to Dublin as James Cousins put it sardonically "to teach us thrift", on the thinking that Cousins: "would be an invaluable adviser" through his "knowledge of people in Dublin and elsewhere who would want to do business with the bank." James Cousins had invested some of the capital himself, drawing substantially however on his in-laws funds. When the bank began to lose money, James Cousins was declared a debtor and the bank was closed. The event, as James Cousins remembered, "brought my name more publicity in the streets of Dublin in an afternoon than eight books of verses and four plays had done."⁵ With characteristic discretion Margaret

⁴ "Keep my name out..." wrote James Cousins to Francis Sheehy Skeffington, 15 September 1909, Sheehy Skeffington Papers, Ms, 21,620 (vii); and later James Cousins wrote again to Francis Sheehy Skeffington: "I am running her visit, but officially it will be done through others to save my face at High school and elsewhere," n.d. Sheehy Skeffington Papers, Ms, 21,620 (vii); James Cousins also wrote to Francis Sheehy Skeffington to ask him to drop him a note to get the required seven signatures needed to form a lodge of the Theosophical Society in Dublin: "membership of the lodge will impose no dogma and will be disclosed or not at the will of the member." Cousins to Francis Sheehy Skeffington, 14 October 1909, MS, 21,620 (viii).

⁵ While in Liverpool James Cousins managed to get the bankruptcy annulled by writing a letter (to whom he could not later remember), setting forth his side of "the story of the bank that was to teach thrift to the Irish. Before long

Cousins made no mention of the affair in her share of the autobiography. However the bankruptcy was only one factor in the Cousinses' decision to leave Ireland. While the bankruptcy put James Cousins as he put it himself "on thin ice in a respectable school and ineligible for a responsible post in commerce again", it was, as he put it, one of the "expulsive forces in our lives in 1912". "The attracting force came from India" and a "growing desire for the touch of the posterity of the rishis and scholars." James Cousins declared that they were leaving Ireland "in search of something that would enable them to intensify their lives and their work," - and he continued -that he "greatly appreciated what had been said about his sympathy with the people; he had always found an inspiration in intercourse with the unspoiled peasantry of the west." James Cousins remembered that five years abroad was their "longest intention."⁶ The organization behind the "Farewell Evening and Presentation" to the Cousinses in Dublin's Hardwicke Street Theatre on 29 May 1913 documents a cross section of their varied social circle as well as

I received a document declaring to the world that I was as solvent as anyone else." Cousins and Cousins, 134-36. Although it is a detail omitted from James Cousins's own account, according to Alan Denson's bio-bibliography of both of the Cousins, James Cousins had borrowed much of the starting investment from his in laws and Margaret Cousins's brother Percy was also one of the bank staff and some of the Cousins's friends also lost money in the venture; see Alan Denson, James H. Cousins (1873-1956) and Margaret E. Cousins (1878-1954): A Bio-Bibliographical Survey (Kendal, Westmorland, England: Author, 1967), 347.

⁶Cousins and Cousins, 213.

distinguishing their particular social reputation amongst their overlapping sets of friends. The organizer of the evening, Francis Sheehy Skeffington, was anxious that no group in particular should dominate the arrangements to the detriment of "the national character of the presentation."⁷ The chairman of the Presentation Committee said he always looked on Mr and Mrs Cousins as being one person; "in their home whoever entered it had to leave behind all sordid thoughts, and had to prepare their brains to work actively in order to accompany Mr and Mrs Cousins to those high planes of imagination on which they were at home."⁸ After representatives from the Cycling Club, Suffragist

⁷Francis Sheehy Skeffington to Mr Gregson, Belfast, 24 March 1913, Sheehy Skeffington Papers, Ms 24,130. And, as Margaret Cousins was well aware, a large part of the drama surrounding their departure was owing to its timing - "seeing as we were leaving the scene of our work just when Home Rule and Votes For Women seemed on the point of becoming law in Ireland." With characteristic self-consciousness, James Cousins reflected on how the Cousineses "variegated" network of friends demonstrated their avant garde social flexibility. "A critical friend accused us of making only propagandist friendships. There was some truth in it but not enough. Not all our psychical or Theosophical friends were vegetarians; few of our suffrage friends could have stood steady on the astral plane, though they were as rocks on lorries surrounded by jeering crowds of bipeds who counted themselves men. Our literary friends were attached to, or semi-detached from, anything and everything in religion, politics and dietetics. By one or other interest, through open house and sympathy with one thing or person at a time, we had a delightfully variegated clientele who were attached to us individually by one or perhaps two heterodoxies, and forgave us the rest."

⁸Cousins, "The Cousins Presentation", Irish Citizen 7 June 1913.

organisations, and the Food Reform movement spoke, Francis Sheehy Skeffington took care not to omit mention of "Mrs Cousins distinction in the musical world", as well as James Cousins "high position as an educationalist and journalist". And posing herself as a prophet moving on to new flocks, Margaret Cousins related the historic evolution of the IWFL, urged her comrades to continue the struggle, and ended with a brisk plea for more imprisonments:

Mrs Cousins, on rising, received an ovation which prevented her from speaking for several minutes. She said that the only consolation in parting from her very dear friends was that she would still be a fellow-worker in the cause of women. Wherever there were women they would be oppressed, and wherever she found women oppressed, she would work for their upliftment; her life was dedicated to service. It was not by her seeking that she was going, but as a pawn in the Great Game of Life, she was being moved on to another square by the Eternal Player. She believed that all things were arranged for the ultimate good; she believed her departure would mean the coming forward of others to realise themselves as she had done. She reviewed the five years since, at Miss Garahan's urging, Mrs Skeffington asked some of them to meet at her house, and six of them took the historic decision to form a militant society; the anxieties of the first meetings, the various moments of triumph and opposition, up to her last happy memory of the sunlight on Mrs Palmer's smile at their most successful suffrage meeting in the Police courts last Friday...The appearance of four new militants within the last few months was a heartening sign, she urged them all to be militant, and left them as her watchwords: "Perseverance, Courage, Loyalty, Imprisonment and Love". Political imprisonment was well understood in Ireland, and imprisonment did more than anything else to forward the cause here. It was not the amount of the damage done it was the fact of high-minded women being in prison that was

valuable.⁹

Margaret Cousins said that she could not leave Ireland permanently: "They would be Irish first and foremost, wherever they went; they would live to the highest that they could, for Ireland as well as for their own self-expression. If they had been able to do anything [in Ireland] it is because Ireland reacts to the environment."¹⁰ They were then presented with a purse of seventy seven gold sovereigns, which only Margaret could officially receive, as all of James Cousins's income was legally owed for the bankruptcy.¹¹

In England, the Cousins settled in Garston, a heavily industrialized town near Liverpool. While James Cousins promoted Hugh Middleton's vegetarian food products at exhibitions around the country, Margaret Cousins still cooked the food, however alternative it was, complaining to Hanna Sheehy Skeffington of how such work drained her of all energy.¹² Throughout her two year sojourn in Liverpool Cousins

⁹Cousins, Irish Citizen 24 May 1913.

¹⁰Cousins, Irish Citizen 24 May 1913.

¹¹"The Cousins Presentation," Irish Citizen 14 June 1913; subscribers included such "notables" as AE, Douglas Hyde, Mrs Spring Rice and Joseph Holloway. The Theatre of Ireland also put on a special benefit evening, to which Yeats contributed five pounds and claimed interestingly that he "valued Mr Cousins very much."

¹²Cousins wrote of how "it deprives you of all brain or time -you live its life and nothing more and [come] home so dog-tired." Cousins to Hanna Sheehy Skeffington, n.d. Sheehy

sorely missed her colleagues in the IWFL but maintained a vigilant eye over its progress. Cousins's clever organizational expertise was still in demand however by the IWFL, as Cousins advised Hanna on how she might extract the maximum from various personalities in the League, and how to approach various parliamentary leaders at Westminster.¹³ Cousins wanted none of Redmond's Home Rule Bill for Ireland precisely because Redmond wanted nothing to do with the suffrage question.

Part of the reason for Cousins's continued correspondence with Hanna Sheehy Skeffington was the fact that she was disappointed by the lack of rapport she found between herself

Skeffington Papers, Ms 22,648 (ii).

¹³"B" and Hanna Sheehy Skeffington to Cousins Ms 22,676 (i) Sept 1 1915 and Cousins to Hanna Sheehy Skeffington Ms, 22,665 (1) 8 month n.d. Cousins was still meticulous about having all of her voluntary contributions to the IWFL properly recorded in the books and still harried Hanna about the financial side of the League: "The financial side was always my worry in the League. Don't for any sake let a debt accumulate again. I am always afraid of debt and was horrified to hear the Citizen had gathered up such a burden of it. I had thought the well continued advertisements covered its cost. What had occasioned the drain?" Cousins's free dishing out of advice to the IWFL even from England demonstrates how vital a force of leadership she had been in the League: "It is grand that you are able to start a branch [of the IWFL] in Belfast out of all the ruins, but I doubt if it will continue to stick by us for long - they are the other side of the Cork stick and as a body equally hard to work with! I fear it will only be another case of organising them and launching them only to be repudiated by them later, but such is our fate and our honour! Even realising this you are right to do it. I wish I could be with you to help. I am getting plenty to do here in all sorts of directions but I would rather be doing it in Dublin with you." Cousins to Hanna Sheehy Skeffington, n.d., Ms 22, 665 (ii) n.d.

and English women suffragists, complaining frequently to Hanna of how much she missed the vital elan of her Irish comrades in Dublin where her role had been so pivotal to the movement. What she consciously missed was the sense of "affinity and rapport with one's co-workers." In England she found the ideological commitment to the suffrage was not enough to bond her to the women. At one point she complained to Hanna: "I can't tell you how working with these women grates on me. One would have thought "one touch of militancy" would make us all kin, but it doesn't I find."¹⁴

Nevertheless Cousins kept a full schedule of "constant speaking engagements for all kinds of societies" and eventually found a niche for herself amongst the Women's Co-operative Guilds: "the better-class artisans and workmens' wives, very common-sense, well trained in governing and running their local guilds, an untilled field practically for suffrage work and the real right stuff." And when her speaking style was appreciated there - for her striking "attitude that held both humour and seriousness together, and mingled earnestness with tolerance" it was adjudged to be owing to her Irish nature.¹⁵

During her two year period in Liverpool Cousins focused

¹⁴Cousins to Hanna Sheehy Skeffington, 29 Oct 1914, Ms 22,667 (ii); Sheehy Skeffington Papers.

¹⁵ They have liked me as a speaker (I think I am improving) and recommend me from one guild to another and get me to make return visits also. Ibid.

her feminist energy on more institutional spiritual concerns than she had done in Dublin. Cousins was amongst those who founded a new women's church, the Church of the New Ideal, in March of 1914. One factor in Cousins's zeal to begin a reformed church was her recent experience of being ejected from a public political meeting at which she was heckling the Bishop of Liverpool: "but with me was ejected a conviction that the cause of womanhood was nothing to the Established Church, and that all organised religion would have to be dealt with, and not only on the matter of votes for women."¹⁶

Although Cousins never attended any church regularly she had a particular fondness for religious cultures and their atmospheres of worship: "psalms and hymns stirred something in my background."¹⁷

The Church of the New Ideal opened in the Town Hall of Liscard, Cheshire, on Sunday March 22, 1914. The Rev. Hattie Baker, a figure well known in alternative religious ventures, preached the first sermon in a service designed by Cousins.¹⁸ Cousins's justified the women's church and on the same basis as she did the need for equal suffrage. She was at pains to

¹⁶Although Cousins attributed such an attitude to her own independently developed world view, which paralleled the Theosophical world view. Cousins and Cousins, 225.

¹⁷Ibid., 228.

¹⁸According to Cousins, Hattie Baker had been consecrated to the ministry by her father, a well-known non-conformist clergyman, and had acted for him in his pulpit. Ibid., 229.

correct the newspapers' charges of separatism - their "false tune" that the church was an "anti-man institution and that what is for something is therefore against something else." She put it instead that its aim was to correct the masculine domination of the churches, and anyway the religious half of the race, she claimed was the feminine half.¹⁹

Cousins was at this time trying to locate her feminist radicalism and her ideals of androgyny in a Christian mythological context. A key article which Cousins published in the Theosophist of April of 1915 was "The Curse of Eve." The article marks her first venture to write for a Theosophical audience, just six months before her removal to Adyar. The curse in question was enforced motherhood and the law of conjugal rights which entitled a husband "to force his attentions on his wife just as he wishes." "The woman suffers shame to her finer feelings, and a gradual hardening of nature through bitterness of spirit." "The curse of even potential generation of her form" led Cousins to calculate that a woman suffers "seven hundred times more than a man in her lifetime." Cousins marked this in terms of a crucifixion of her sisters. Continuing the Christian metaphor, Cousins heralded education and economic independence of women as the "Angels of Annunciation proclaiming the conception of the New Era" which she felt had already begun:

¹⁹Cousins's sermon to Church of the New Ideal, cited in Daily News and Leader 20 May 1914, cited in Cousins and Cousins, 229.

the cosmic redemptive process with which the removal of all Eve's subjection and sorrow will be concurrently achieved; to reinstate Eve to her role as comrade and helpmeet of Adam not a slave and temptress....One of the essential conditions for further progress on our journey is the dethronment of the present idolatry of the function of motherhood".²⁰

It was Cousins's basic argument that the choice of maternity should belong to the wife - not that motherhood was wrong, but that it was no virtue in and of itself: "The reaction from the present secretly hated sex and maternity slavery may tend to an exaggeration of selfish freedom." Yet Cousins acknowledged that it was a responsibility which:

...nature has imposed on her of building forms so that souls will have some necessary means of development. Realizing this woman will become conscious co-creator with the divine will, and evolution will improved at a much increased rate, improvement in the quality of the race being accompanied by its gradual decrease in quantity.... The new world ideal must be the attainment of the state of the Blessed Virgin. Such perfect purity and chastity can be won by man and woman alike. It was the condition of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden, it was the very nature of Jesus Christ - who is considered the first fruits of the perfecting humanity. The Christ was the perfect man-woman.²¹

The outbreak of war in June of 1914 changed Cousins's life

²⁰Cousins, "The Curse of Eve," Theosophist (April 1915):6-39.

²¹Ibid., 8.

radically. Cousins's reactions followed the popular curve of an initial excitement, arousal, and militant celebration of war at its outbreak to subsequent disillusionment and horror;

Out of all this will come great good...I think a fight and militancy is good for the character of individuals and nations. We all want licking into shape and peace does not always bring the best out of us as we militants have discovered.²²

Cousins alighted on the opportunity of the war as a validation of the type of aggressive militance for which she and her comrades had been so long ridiculed: "We militants have already gone through a dress rehearsal of it all."²³ Cousins also hoped however that the war would bring the suffrage "quicker than anything else" and she therefore declared herself "all for it." As the masculinist chauvinism of the war effort began to wear on her Cousins however became frustrated that women were excluded from the fighting especially when she felt that women had always faced as much bloodshed with equally heroic, if less hyped courage in the everyday experience of childbirth - an ignored "national service". She felt that women must train for the "actual field and fighting

²² "Of course too my belief in reincarnation enables me to look at death in a very helpful light too. The one -life theory does not fit a time like this at all," Cousins to Hanna Sheehy Skeffington, Sheehy Skeffington Papers, n.d. c.1914, Ms, 22,670.

²³ Cousins to Hanna Sheehy Skeffington, Sheehy Skeffington Papers, 7 September 1914, Ms, 22,667 (i).

in the future" as "a monopoly of the glory and importance of warfare feeds men's vanity": "Reading about nothing but men, men, men makes me jealous these days, especially as I know women could do the same work just as well if not better:"²⁴

...the absurdity of saying women can't fight when every day many of them are going into the valley of the shadow willingly for the future of the race and country and that without all the excitement of war but almost as one might say in cold blood.²⁵

It is perhaps ironic that Cousins should equate the national service of child birth with the war effort of the soldiers when the reasons for the sexual division of labor were indeed partially shaped by exigencies of war. There is also a sense in which Cousins lived for the high drama of the militant campaign and therefore experienced a sense of dislocation as the war interrupted suffragist momentum and she found herself excluded from volunteer service, this time on the basis of her dubiously militant past: "Winter without the suffrage will be

²⁴Cousins to Hanna Sheehy Skeffington, Sheehy Skeffington Papers, n.d. c.1914 Ms, 22,670.

²⁵Cousins to Hanna Sheehy Skeffington, 24 May 1915, Sheehy Skeffington Papers, National Library of Ireland, Ms 21, 620, (v). And again in India "the function of motherhood is an international bond of women the world over. Childbirth is the silent battlefield of womanhood..[who] are as much national heroes as any khaki-clad soldier in the European war. Cousins, The Awakening of Asian Womanhood, 18.

strange."²⁶ Clearly the war and the waning of the suffragist drive further heightened Cousins's sense of isolation and dislocation in English culture which left her at something of a loose end during the early war years, frustrating her tremendous energy for the cut and thrust of public politics. When Francis Sheehy Skeffington was arrested for his pacifist activities Cousins wrote to Hanna:

I really envy you still living so strenuously. I long for life on the great adventure scale again. Only a few days before I got your news I was saying the old longing to be a man had come back to me so that I could fight against conscription and be shot if necessary in support of the Xtian and human principle "Thou shalt not kill."²⁷

Less than a year after the war began Cousins turned more feverishly against the war, scorning "the frightfulness of militarism" as "an evil that generates human monsters and mad men" and by 1920 she was particularly appalled by women militarists: "a woman militarist is appalling, however, unselfish her aims."²⁸ Some of Cousins's emergent antipathy toward the militarist may have been caused by her

²⁶"At present I am out of everything. I think it's a case of 'no militant need apply,' even when I volunteered service." Cousins to Hanna Sheehy Skeffington, Sheehy Skeffington Papers, 7 September 1914, Ms, 22,667 (i).

²⁷Cousins to Hanna Sheehy Skeffington, 8 September 1914, Sheehy Skeffington Papers, Ms 22,648 (iii).

²⁸Cousins to Hanna Sheehy Skeffington, 2 June 1920, Ms 22,691 (iii).

marginalization from the WSPU as it began to organize women toward the war effort. And then there were the internal splits of the WSPU which excised the Pethick Lawrences, Cousins's favorites, which made Cousins ever more suspicious of the Pankhursts: "how fearfully they have gone off the lines." In September 1914 she wrote:

There is much discontent amongst W.S.P.U members over the curt and insufficiently explained cessation of the Union. It is almost too great a tax on loyalty to and faith in Christabel's knowledge and judgement. I think it must be entirely a question of locked-up funds and the necessity for secrecy about their location....²⁹

And Cousins was adamantly against Sylvia Pankhurst's more socialist feminist East End group which broke away from the WSPU:

I look on Asquith's answer to the East-End women as fresh evidence of red herrings over our track. That East-End movement is a class movement not a real women's one and will ruin us on the adult suffrage issue. I think it very hurtful, and the men in it do not see things as we women do. They would sacrifice the principle of the equality demand as at present for adult suffrage and that is a queer long look out for women! They will be nobbled by the Govt. tricksters and what promised to be their help will become our hindrance. Is Liverpool making

²⁹Cousins to Hanna Sheehy Skeffington, 7 September 1914, Ms 22,667 (i).

me pessimistic? Perhaps.³⁰

Added to Cousins's growing war-weariness and attendant tapering of suffragist activity was her increasing frustration with the harsh, industrial environment of Garston from which she searched desperately for any route of escape:

The place is so ugly and the whole condition so lowering. I hate it as much or more than ever at present....I long for the time when we can leave here but there is not a hint of any opening of any kind so far as we can see. It is great training in patience and endurance.... We must get to mountains and water after this arid desert. Sometimes I feel literally hungry for beauty and for Irish homeliness and brightness...³¹

In March of 1915 Annie Besant, then international president of the Theosophical Society, accepted James Cousins's offer of his journalistic talent to work for her new Madras based newspaper New India, and duly enclosed two fares and an agreement for three years. Cousins wrote to Hanna of her release from this "spiritual prison" in this "ugly and hateful city" while assuring her a little lamely that there was "no way back to Ireland at present" as "Jim had tried:" "I so hate Liverpool that I am impatient for Sept. and look forward very

³⁰Cousins to Hanna Sheehy Skeffington, 25 June 1914, Sheehy Skeffington Papers, Ms 22, 665.

³¹Cousins to Hanna Sheehy Skeffington, 26 June 1914, Sheehy Skeffington Papers, National Library of Ireland, Ms 22, 665 (i).

much to a change though I don't expect it to be heaven. The heat prospects look more like the other place!"³²

Cousins's blunt construction of the exotic for the comrades she was wistfully leaving behind is interesting: "He and she will be the only white people on the staff" and "it will be great to see an entirely new and non-commercial country with a non-British civilisation and a great traditional and spiritual past."³³ But it was the intensity of Cousins's need for "the cause" in which "India" was cast: Cousins looked on the trip as a heaven sent break in which she could rerail herself to the lines of the women's cause in India as she had done in Ireland. Cousins spoke of how she was still feeling that she was "too much of the parasitic wife" for her own liking. On several occasions during this period Cousins was

³²Cousins to Hanna Sheehy Skeffington, n.d. (Sept 1915?) Sheehy Skeffington Papers, Ms 22,648 (ii).

³³Cousins to Hanna Sheehy Skeffington, n.d. (Sept 1915?) Sheehy Skeffington Papers, MS 22,648 (ii). As Cousins put it herself rather curiously: "A goodbye visit had to be paid to Ireland." Cousins visited her "parental home" of Boyle alone while James Cousins stayed in Dublin to renew old friendships. A visit to AE tells something of how the atmosphere of their old mystical circles in Dublin had shifted: "A last call on AE gave me a glimpse of the littlenesses that can smear spots on the sun of greatness. He scarified the leaders of the Theosophical Society because their writings had no style, which seemed to me a mixing of purposes, and because they saw some detail of a thought-form differently from him, which seemed to me to give them just as much reason for scarifying him, only scarifying was not in their method. As I went down the familiar steps of 17 Rathgar Avenue, AE stood like a great angry deity against the light inside, and said with fervour, his hands brought down clenched by his sides: 'Cousins, beware of that charlatan, Annie Besant.'" Cousins and Cousins, 210.

extremely anxious to convince her colleagues in Dublin of how she had not lost touch with the suffragist independence of spirit as some of them annoyed her by implying.³⁴

I hope I'll find some kind of a career or vocation for myself in India in my own right such as I had in the I.W.F.L and those last years in Ireland. Here I have had plenty to do but it has been of a higgledy-piggledy kind. I prefer straight lines even though they be hard.³⁵

...What is going to become of me God only knows! But I am not afraid that I won't find some useful niche before long. I want to help the Indian women, just think only three out of every hundred get any education,....

God alone knows what work I will be thrown into but feminism will be on top as it is in every meeting I have to do with here and I want to help Indian women as much as any other.³⁶

³⁴Cousins to Hanna Sheehy Skeffington, n.d. (Sept 1915?) Sheehy Skeffington Papers, MS 22,648 (ii). Cousins replied rather testily in a letter to Hanna Sheehy Skeffington to a comment which her old Dublin colleague, Meg Connery, had apparently written earlier: "Show this to Mrs Connery and thank her for her letter. I'm surprised she thinks Jim "lets" or "permits" me! I do what I think best and he has to put up with it and I may say he does the same!" Cousins to Hanna Sheehy Skeffington, 24 March 1915. Ms 22,672 (iii). Relating for instance how she had passed on an opportunity to hear a James Cousins lecture in favor of a musical concert: "'chacun son gout', there was a special symphony on I wanted to hear. You see, I know him!" Cousins to Hanna Sheehy Skeffington, Sheehy Skeffington Papers, 29 October 1914, MS, 22,667 (i).

³⁵Cousins to Hanna Sheehy Skeffington, n.d. (Sept 1915?) Sheehy Skeffington Papers, MS 22,648 (ii).

³⁶Cousins to Hanna Sheehy Skeffington, 8 September 1914, Sheehy Skeffington Papers, Ms 22,648 (iii).

Increasingly horrified by the breakdown of western civilization, which the war signified to the Cousinses, they began to put all of their hopes for regeneration in the idea of the great originality of the East. Cousins hoped the new environment would inspire her poetic juices as she expected to be "turned more onto writing in India." Indeed Cousins had already begun publishing frequent articles in the Theosophical monthly, the Adyar Bulletin of 1915. It is striking that while she and James Cousins alike sought every opportunity to publicize his literary name and foster his abstract metaphysical meditations, Cousins herself always found it necessary to legitimize her own pursuits by ensuring that they formed part of a visible, concrete and practical cause for the betterment of humanity. She tended always to write either inspirational Theosophical essays, feminist tracts or pieces of cultural documentary, preferring to leave the world of fiction and romance to her husband.

James Cousins justified his exit from western civilization as a vote against the decadent turn of modernism and a turn instead toward the occult sense of a unified ordered universe:

On the side of art, long before the war we had felt the growing momentum of a bog-slide towards anarchic sensuality in both art and life. We longed for a group of artists who realised the unity underlying the diversities of life, who found joy in the beneficent interaction of all varieties of aesthetical and human expression, and who shared with us the experience of inspiration and

illumination from higher levels of consciousness.³⁷

Although James Cousins also wrote to Francis Sheehy Skeffington in far more material terms of the damaging effect which the war was having on his trade:

I fear that this ghastly collapse of civilization (for which perhaps we should really rejoice) will divert all possible aid into other channels. Things are so precarious that we must close down all the exits.³⁸

³⁷Cousins and Cousins, 235.

³⁸James Cousins to Francis Sheehy Skeffington, n.d. Sheehy Skeffington Papers, MS 21,626.

CHAPTER 4

ADYAR TO MADANAPALLE

While the Cousinses arrived in Adyar in November 1915, their mouths watering in anticipation of oriental promise, and eager to serve awhile in Besant's Theosophical machine, what happened to their aspirations once they got there is quite another story. Until they found their own feet in India it was the fortunes of the Theosophical Society which defined them, and at the moment of the Cousinses' arrival the fortunes of the Theosophical society were dramatic. In fact James Cousins had himself a hand in shaping those dramatics. The Cousinses' first years in India were dominated by the God of war and the changing fortunes it brought the empire.

In 1915 Besant found herself to be a media magnate and a rising star in the circles of the Indian National Congress. It was for that reason that the idea of importing an Irish Theosophist nationalist journalist as "sub assistant literary editor" on her amazingly successful new paper New India was a fashionable one. In May of 1916 however, just nine months into his original three year agreement, James Cousins was fired when he sang rather too strongly the praises of the executed leaders of the Easter Rebellion of 1916 in the pages of New India. James Cousins's article was the last straw in a series

of charges of sedition against New India. The Governor of Madras Presidency took the unusual step of asking for sureties against the paper, a move which presented Besant with an occasion to publicize the firmness of her stance against the government. On her refusal to pay she was promptly interned at Ooty hill station for several months. Besant's internment only served to endear her further to her growing swell of nationalist followers, to the extent that on her release she was elected President of the Indian National Congress. Besant presided very briefly over the Congress before her own unfortunate presumptuously imperial manner combined with her ill termed comments on the Amritsar massacre of 1919, and the gathering momentum behind Mohandas K. Gandhi, to brush her aside as a leading figure in the Congress by 1920.

Although Besant's playing of the "Irish card" in Indian nationalist politics, in the form of James Cousins's journalism had indeed helped to catapult her into the Congress presidency, the upshot of it all for the Cousinses was that they were required to find alternative means of employment. When Besant offered the Cousinses their return fares to Ireland James Cousins briskly reminded her that they had not come to India on a short visit and that "they would find some way of being of service to India." Margaret Cousins was "knocked out by disappointment" and by Besant's ungratefulness and lack of consideration: "to think that our obviously appreciated services to India should be cut off, and that our

breaking away from our home-surroundings and special work should be counted as nothing."¹

James Cousins was offered a lectureship in English at a Christian missionary college in north India but instead opted to stay within the Theosophical network by taking up a teaching position in the newly established Besant Theosophical College in Madanapalle, an inland hill town more than two hundred miles west of Madras. The Cousinses' rustication to Madanapalle coincided logically with Besant's renewed emphasis on her plan to diffuse the evolution of a new Indian civilization through a network of schools and colleges under the endowment of the Theosophical Educational Trust. This educational philosophy was an Indianized version of an educational philosophy Besant had adopted in the 1880s in England. In common with much of the rhetoric of modern liberalism which Theosophists adopted, Besant insisted that there should be equal rights to free education for all. However a vital aspect of the Theosophical program was that education could be the medium for the training of a newly traditionalized global civilization in which India would lead the way. This visionary civilization would function as a spiritual complement to the materialism of modern western

¹Cousins must also have been puzzled that Besant would jovially take her to a wedding ("It was always a pleasure to see her off the platform, and to see her as the humourous semi-Irishwoman and the kind mother") on the very Sunday morning on which she would later issue the Cousinses with their walking papers. Cousins and Cousins, 279.

culture, thereby providing options of difference for the natural selective processes of global evolution. With this in mind both Sanskrit and English were basic curricular features of the Theosophical educational plan, as were moral and religious instruction. Margaret Cousins was duly appointed teacher of English, Domestic Science and Handicrafts in the affiliated High School from which the college had developed. The Cousinses therefore dutifully applied themselves to the mission already laid out for them by helping the emergence of these civilizational values in their students.

The Cousins were stationed in Madanapalle for the most part between 1916 and 1922 and spent more time living in Madanapalle on and off until the late 1930s than anywhere else in India. Cousins's first years in Madanapalle reflect her restless efforts to find that "vocation of her own" in a country town beyond the confines of the Theosophical headquarters in Adyar as she struggled to carve a serviceable identity for herself in Indian society. In her letters to Hanna Sheehy Skeffington Cousins constantly looked back with fond memories on that earlier animated, virile public self-identity which she had so enjoyed in Ireland.

Even from Adyar, in anticipation of the move to Madanapalle, Cousins reveals a blend of excited, adventurous naivete and worldly savvy as she wondered how well she would fit into a South Indian country town. She wrote to Hanna Sheehy Skeffington, "there will be only one other white

person. So we will be in real India." Cousins knew herself well enough to know how much she needed a busy, active metropolitan lifestyle, worrying that unless her teaching engrossed her she would find it very lonely. Her instincts were of course correct and she was soon reporting on the "real India" as "interesting but not wholly satisfying. I always say one thing which will drive me home sooner or later will be the longing for an orchestral concert!" Cousins was painfully lonely in Madanapalle. It was Cousins's sense of isolation and desperate need to feel connected to a bigger world which compelled her efforts to forge a cause in which to invest herself.

Cousins initially found succor and connection in her special responsibilities to the girl students who charmed her and gave her a sense of being accepted and trusted in their lives as a sort of maternal figure. Indeed Cousins was flattered that the girls should call her "Mommy:"² "Such stories as are disclosed to me at times!" - "I don't know how

² In Madanapalle Cousins also erected a gymnastic apparatus in an area of the playground which came to be called Margaret Garden. Apparently gymnastics did not quite take the fancy of Madanapalle students however and in 1924 the area was covered with mud huts for vernacular instruction and in 1933 these huts were again demolished and the place converted to a badminton court for girls which still remained in 1993. Cousins played hostess to the boys some evenings with games and music, and supervised monthly moonlight dinners and excursions. The girls lived apart meeting the boys only at daily assemblies and in the classrooms and they were reportedly "able in some ways to preserve a more truly Indian atmosphere, religious and artistic, than their brothers".Theosophical College Magazine, Silver Jubilee Souvenir, 1915-1940, 943.

many of my students may be pretending that I am their aunt or grandmother they are spending the afternoon with!"³ Anxious to impress both herself and Hanna that she was still dogged in her educational mission, Cousins's letters overflow with teaching vignettes of her struggles to inculcate the student body with idealistic initiative, which, while serving to reflect herself as a sort of fearless seditious pioneer of human rights, they also reflect her unbridled frustration with the boys' "fundamental masculine thought" and what she variously spoke of as the local "flaccidness", "submission" and lack of "gumption."

Indirectly too, both Jim and I are cramming feminism into the boys and trying to change their attitudes to women. This week they have all been writing an essay on Mrs Besant for a competition commemorating her birthday and it has given us great scope and revealed their fundamental masculine thought. Sentences like the following occur: "Among the many men who have fought for India Mrs Besant ranks highest"! "Though a woman in form she is a man in spirit;" "though she has the appearance of a woman, she is greater than a man I think. "Oh, they make me grind my teeth, these revelations!"⁴....Jim and I keep instilling

³Cousins to Hanna Sheehy Skeffington, 2 Nov 1916, Sheehy Skeffington Papers, Ms 22,680.

⁴Cousins to Hanna Sheehy Skeffington, 21 September 1916, Sheehy Skeffington Papers, Ms 22,688; Cousins's frustration in the same letter with the students' uncritical use of masculinity as the standard against which woman's achievement is to be measured is of course rooted very obviously and securely in patriarchal assumptions. Yet Cousins's impatient irritation with such blatantly obvious instances of ingrained sexist thinking on the part of school children can be viewed with some sense of irony in the context of her own

rebellion and determination into them. You should have felt the thrill in the room last Sunday as I taught them and they all repeated after fully understanding it - "I will because it is right!"⁵

Indeed the thrilling charge of a raised mass consciousness and alternative auxiliary national youth army was institutionalized in the school in the form of Besant's alternative Theosophical boyscout/girl guide organization, whose aim it was to drill Indian youth in the national folk culture selected by Theosophists.

Although Cousins came to India with the idea of extending her cause to that of "Indian womanhood," she appears to have found little scope in that direction while in Adyar. This was possibly because she was feeling her way in to unfamiliar territory and the "need" may not have seemed so immediately urgent amongst her largely well-heeled, educated, Theosophical circle where she was more tightly kept under Besant's formidable wing. Once out of Adyar however Cousins began to "get in touch" with local women. The forms of expression which Cousins's feminist reform activism found in India were at

however more subtle dependence on male categories as a way to measure and critique definitions of femaleness and female potential for empowerment, as for instance in her stances both for and against war as a sphere which women could occupy "as well as any man", and then subsequently as a sphere unnatural and alien to woman. Cousins often played the essentialist card herself for strategic reasons, whether consciously or not.

⁵Cousins to Hanna Sheehy Skeffington, 2 Nov 1916, Sheehy Skeffington Papers, MS 22,680.

first closely identified with Besant's cultural nationalist and social reform projects. And although Cousins's fortunes on both the crassly material and the deeply ideological levels were always to some extent tied up with those of Besant and the Theosophical Society, over the years Cousins would evolve a social and political identity in wider circles independently of Adyar.

Cousins's rich correspondence with Hanna Sheehy Skeffington, during her first four years in India, documents in detail which is significantly suppressed in later autobiographical accounts, the story of her initial efforts to connect with "the woman's cause" in India. It may well have been Cousins's anxiety to impress upon her old friends that she had not abandoned her campaign but was still indeed ploughing the same feminist furrow under new skies that the image she projects is that of the lone pioneer venturing in the thickest of pre-feminist territory. In September 1916 for example she reported delightedly to Hanna Sheehy Skeffington:

Since I last wrote I am thankful to say that I have got into touch with the Indian women here. The secretary of the Theosophical Society here, a lawyer, is a fine feminist and an enthusiastic worker. He got about eighty women together, two Sundays ago, and I talked to them and made them show me their gold ornaments and sing to me and generally we got on very friendly terms. They came again last Sunday and I am arranging lesson classes twice a week and a general social kind of gathering, every Sunday for them with the help of two girl students who are studying for Second Arts

and who can speak to them and interpret for me.⁶

In view of Cousins's scrupulous success in preserving her public image from the merest hint of condescension or personal ambition it is humanizing that here she should so carelessly drop a reflection of herself as the new nanny tenderly engaging the trust of her shy keep. Cousins's letters to Hanna redound with the relief of at last having made a connection with Indian women across what she obviously felt to be an enormous divide, not the least of which was caused by her inability to communicate in the local Tamil. She wrote to Hanna of how she was grounded "by the claims of the girls and women here who are in a far worse state, I think, than Western women. Think-only one girl in every hundred educated!"... "what settled me was getting in touch with the Indian women." Such epithets also served however to affirm Cousins's part in the work of the global sisterhood, a part which both justified her exilic absence from the Irish cause, and allowed her still to feel part of it: "Are we down-hearted? No! Our cause - which is woman-hood the world-wide, is progressing by leaps and bounds and it cannot be put back in England or Ireland."⁷ Cousins was still during her first years in India contributing articles and money to the Irish Citizen and the IWFL. In 1918

⁶Cousins to Hanna Sheehy Skeffington, 21 Sept 1916, Sheehy Skeffington Papers, Ms 22,688.

⁷Cousins to Hanna Sheehy Skeffington, 24 Nov 1916, Sheehy Skeffington Papers, Ms 24,101.

she wrote to Hanna of how "the loneliest evening I had in India was when I heard we had won the vote. I missed you all so badly." Later she organized "a jubilant meeting in Adyar."

Even four years into her residence in India Cousins wrote to Hanna of how she wished "for our old virile mental companionship, here there is only flabbiness or an entirely wrong sexed angle on things."⁹ "I often feel suffocated though I say what I think myself, but otherwise there is dumbness or "submission" (hateful word!);"¹⁰ "The Indians lose courage of expression out here, they are so cowed poor things."¹¹ It was clearly important to Cousins that her old Irish comrades should know that despite all social constraints she remained as "uncowed" by Indian patriarchal structures as those of anywhere else. As she complained of the "cramped" atmosphere on "expression on matters between the sexes" her epic Irish days of yore seemed ever more lush; "how fresh and free it felt" she wrote Hanna to read the copies of the Irish Citizen which Hanna had sent.

Cousins's frustrated desires for a public virility in India, lent her more time to offer directives to Hanna and it

⁸Cousins to Hanna Sheehy Skeffington, 22 June 1918, Sheehy Skeffington Papers, Ms 24,102.

⁹Cousins to Hanna Sheehy Skeffington, 4 November Sheehy Skeffington Papers, Ms 22,688 (ii).

¹⁰Cousins to Hanna Sheehy Skeffington, 4 November 1915, Sheehy Skeffington Papers Ms 22,688.

¹¹Cousins to Hanna Sheehy Skeffington, 21 July 1916, Sheehy Skeffington Papers, Ms 22, 279 (ii).

also provided a new context for her to react to the surprise Irish rebellion of 1916. Margaret Cousins fully shared her husband's sympathy for the 1916 rebels as allies in the good cause of freedom and idealism. She was ultimately excited to discover a spirit of that noble idealism and self-sacrifice amongst even mundane working men: "What a halo it puts around the vans the men drove, the counters they served behind. Their idealism and self-sacrifice gave a wonderful new dignity to the most ordinary daily labour."¹² When Cousins proceeded to canonize the executed rebels for the "glorious unembittered spirit" shown by them "in their moments of crucifixion," she was using sacrificial imagery used by the rebels themselves and indeed used earlier by herself to describe her own moment of militant self-sacrifice.¹³

¹²Cousins to Hanna Sheehy Skeffington, 7 July 1916, Sheehy Skeffington Papers, Ms 22,279 (V).

¹³Cousins to Hanna Sheehy Skeffington, 21 September 1916, Sheehy Skeffington Papers, Ms 22,688; for a feminist analysis of sacrifice and gender see Mary Condren, "Work-in Progress: Sacrifice and Political Legitimation" Journal of Women's History 6:4/ 7:1 (Winter/Spring 1995):160-189. Cousins was twice marked by the genealogy of passive resistance movements of the twentieth century with which she was associated. Interestingly another of her contemporaries, Mohandas K. Gandhi, had witnessed a certain strategic mode of "satyagraha" at work in English suffragism. He then carried this heavily Christian influenced idea of passive resistance to South Africa and thence to India where by the early 1920s the idea of nonviolent resistance circulated amongst Congress members, a nationalist organization itself initially linked with Theosophists in India. In a sense both Cousins and Gandhi were children of the same times; both were at least partially influenced by a post-Victorian revival of Christianity and new age/Theosophical mysticism which both supported and was supported by the feminist social purity ethic of militant

Contrary to what one might at first think, the Cousinsses' burst of excited support for the 1916 revolutionaries comes as no surprise after the 1915 anti-war pacifism. Apparently they followed the swell of both Irish and international public opinion which, against the severity of the British treatment of the rebels, made the initial violence of the rebels in retrospect seem negligible, if not heroically "innocent." Cousins's enthusiasm was not so much inspired by the nationalist cause itself as much as by the rebels' David-like challenge to the "Prussianist" monster of English militarism. Cousins recapitulated her festering ire about the British government's neglect of the suffrage issue to a sort of retributive, vindictive "I told you so" attitude which she couched in a metaphysical theory of moral retribution. Cousins felt that the multiple predicaments of the British government were caused by a karmic return of the oppressed - a notion which her husband was at the same time casually applying to almost all global crises in New India:

What an awful state England is in just now, with
its press-gangs, its shooting of conscientious

self-sacrifice against what was perceived as the masculinist and Western destructive power games of greed, materialism and "scientific progress." This social purity or maternalist strain of feminist ideology seemed to have proven its point by 1918 with a warful of evidence in its ideological arsenal and thus largely dominated both the ideology and sexual epistemology of the European feminist movement in the inter-war period. So that Cousins was drawn to what later could be termed the "Gandhian" way (and physically to India itself) largely by the same cultural pressures as Gandhi himself.

objection, its looming labour troubles, to say nothing of its treatment of Ireland. What suffering it will have to undergo in order to teach it its lesson!¹⁴

Ever the suffragist, Cousins's first thought was always how feminists could take advantage of any shift in political circumstances: "I hope the suffrage societies will wake up and press their point of vantage;"¹⁵ "I pray that the women may be given the vote before the war ends in a quiet way. Something must be done about registrations soon. Where are the Pankhursts?"¹⁶

Indeed Cousins had a characteristic talent for putting her metaphysics to the service of a canny strategic opportunism as she interpreted all changes as God-given openings to the evolving feminist cause and therefore found it her urgent moral duty to strike while the iron was hot. From the distance of Madanapalle she advised Irish suffragists on the terming of their demands:

It is very interesting to see how the sins of the government are coming home to roost now by the way it becomes the stumbling block in every franchise proposal.... I hope all will stick to the old equality demand "on the same terms" as it covers all circumstances including adult suffrage and

¹⁴Cousins to Hanna Sheehy Skeffington, 2 November 1916, Sheehy Skeffington Papers, Ms 22, 680.

¹⁵Cousins to Hanna Sheehy Skeffington, 17 August 1916, Sheehy Skeffington Papers, Ms 22, 279 (iv).

¹⁶Cousins to Hanna Sheehy Skeffington, 21 July 1916, Sheehy Skeffington Papers, Ms 22, 279 (ii).

automatically adjusts itself to every change save the definition of the "service vote" into merely "fighting vote", a definition that should be fought tooth and nail.¹⁷

Heightening the Cousinses' despair with the militarism of the British government was the brutal murder of their good friend, suffragist and pacifist, Francis Sheehy Skeffington at the hands of a British army officer in jail without a trial. Francis Sheehy Skeffington had been arrested during the 1916 rising for his efforts to stop the looting of the city. The verdict at the court martial of Major Bowen-Colthurst, the officer in question, was that he was insane when he gave the orders. Whether or not this was the case it was Cousins's conclusion that "the whole English Government is as mad as Colthurst in its treatment of the Rebellionists." Following what she termed the "barbaric" hanging of another rebel, Roger Casement, she cast the British government as crucifiers just as she had earlier analogized Francis Sheehy Skeffington as the martyred Christ - the "prince of peace, the crucified pacifist:" "Father forgive them for they know not what they do is all one is reduced to in thought, but it is awful."¹⁸

¹⁷Cousins to Hanna Sheehy Skeffington, 17 Aug 1916, Sheehy Skeffington Papers, Ms 22, 279 (iv).

¹⁸On hearing of the official enquiry into the reasons for Francis Sheehy Skeffington's execution, Cousins commented to Hanna: "May the whole enquiry prove in glaring limelight the Prussianism of English and all militarism and be a big factor in sweeping that horror from the world! Cousins to Hanna Sheehy Skeffington, 3 Aug 1916, Sheehy Skeffington Papers, Ms 22, 279 (iv); Cousins was not the only one to refer to

The death of Francis Sheehy Skeffington brought Cousins closer to Hanna, as Cousins redefined her loving relationship to Hanna: "I am agonising with you. I can say no more at present to you but that day and night since I heard...I have been with you in thought and realised how much I love you and want to help you."¹⁹ She sent "loving friendship cemented by work and ideals and sympathy and understanding of loss and loneliness." Cousins had in 1912 lost her own younger sister to death caused most likely by tuberculosis. While mourning for her sister Cousins had received a series of psychic messages and presences from her sister. Soon after hearing of Francis's murder Cousins again received a series of psychic messages of good cheer from the late Francis Sheehy Skeffington which she relayed to Hanna, explaining that Hanna's mind was too clouded for such pure receptivity from her husband:

he is still preaching peace and especially to soldiers passed over. He said he tries to impress himself on you and on others but the minds are so full of their own thoughts, or else too strained in desire for contact (which equally fills and clouds them) that he cannot have the clients he wishes for... Pure receptivity is the necessary medium, a listening without any critical faculty or desire, til the end of the visit as it were. He misses you he told me, but he has more comfort than you as he

Francis Sheehy Skeffington as a Christ-like figure - their mutual friend James Joyce referred to him as "the creepin' Jaysus."

¹⁹Cousins to Hanna Sheehy Skeffington, 10 June 1916, Sheehy Skeffington Papers, Ms 22,279 (ii).

can know your thoughts."²⁰

Perhaps it was her own psychic experience of the blurring of the boundaries between life and death which combined with her belief in reincarnation to assure Hanna "that the idea of separation is only an illusion of the physical senses and that in truth there is no death in Love and Unity! How I wish I could give you an Xmas present of some of my sense of

²⁰ Cousins to Hanna Sheehy Skeffington, 17 August 1916, Sheehy Skeffington Papers, Ms 22,279 (iv). "The gift I have for switching off my own thinking, though leaving the consciousness in command is quite a natural thing born with me, and I suppose it constitutes one of the essentials of inter-communication." Cousins to Hanna Sheehy Skeffington, 2 November 1916, Sheehy Skeffington Papers, Ms 22, 680. Leslie Pielou also wrote Hanna Sheehy Skeffington affirming that he would accept "Gretta's account of her communications seeing as she had such a logical mind." Pielou to Hanna Sheehy Skeffington. n.d. Sheehy Skeffington Papers, Ms 22,680. Cousins to Hanna Sheehy Skeffington, 12 October 1916, Sheehy Skeffington Papers, Ms 22,679. "Walking up a quiet path from the chambers a fortnight ago I suddenly became aware of his presence beside me, and he said "at last I have found you in a receptive mood" and went on to tell me that he most certainly was still alive and more acutely conscious than ever though said he "I am not on that account assured of permanent immortality" (It was so like him)...he is still preaching peace and especially to soldiers passed over. He said he tries to impress himself on you and on others but the minds are so full of their own thoughts, or else too strained in desire for contact (which equally fills and clouds them) that he cannot have the clients he wishes for. Pure receptivity is the necessary medium, a listening without any critical faculty or desire, til the end of the visit as it were. He misses you he told me, but he has more comfort than you as he can know your thoughts." Cousins to Hanna Sheehy Skeffington, 17 August 1916, Sheehy Skeffington Papers, Ms 22, 279 (iv).

certainty about these things!"²¹ Yet Cousins's buoyant optimism in her remarkable personal defence system against death appears as just a little insensitive to the shock experienced by Hanna on the death of her husband just a few months before, at the very moment when the very same loss enabled Cousins to mediate now literally between Hanna and her deceased husband. Hanna's depression threatened Cousins's insistence on her absolute independence to the extent that she examined her own possibilities for a weak dependency but was able to reassure herself that her defenses would hold quite solid:

I am so surprised to find how wrapped up in Frank's life you seem to have been. It seems absurd to think of you, you, wanting to commit "suttee" and feeling that your life, and inspiration and desire to live for causes, were all ended by the physical passing away of your husband. Why, though I understand the inevitable loneliness and awful shock you have had - still the spirit of your thought is like an atavism to the clinging ivy and hoary oak arguments of the anti. I would never have guessed you depended so much on him. Perhaps providence is using this as your last trial by fire in the crucible of self-reliance. Strangely enough, I do not feel that I would lose heart so much as you if Jim passed away, -perhaps because I feel so certain of future reunion and even of continuous interchange of help to the consciousness of outside of the limited brain portion - and because it might be easier for me, the experience is not asked of me! I don't know why I have gone on in this line in this letter, and I hope it will not hurt you, for indeed I grieve with you and can understand the shock against the world and life you have both come through, and long to comfort and strengthen you. Oh, the poor widows of India, ground to the dust, pack-mules for all the family - dreadful,

²¹Cousins to Hanna Sheehy Skeffington, 24 November 1916, Sheehy Skeffington Papers, Ms 24,101.

dreadful.²²

As a quick change of subject the Indian widow as pack-mule comes to the rescue of a Cousins having just caught her insensitivity to her recently widowed Irish friend. Cousins seems to have perhaps harbored a suppressed exasperation with Hanna's dependence on Frank. Barely concealed in Cousins's almost gloating flipness is a sense of her defensive agitation about her own independence. What this momentary slip might suggest is the complicated way in which Cousins projected her unconscious fears of her own powerlessness and dependency on to the "poor widows of India" thus securing her own identity as a woman of virility, independence and absolute invincibility which could withstand even the possibility of her husband's death - and possibly even her own.

It is in the framework of Cousins's deep seated and chronic fears of the submission associated with femininity - the "hoary arguments of the antis" - and her insistence on her self-dependence, that one can make sense of what might seem to be her contradictory positions on militancy and militarism. Cousins's personal struggle of independence thus provided a barely acknowledged template for her wider social campaigns as she struggled to forge a principled strategy of resistance out of her militant past and her wartime pacifism in her

²²Cousins to Hanna Sheehy Skeffington, 21 Sept 1916, Sheehy Skeffington Papers, Ms 22,688.

transition from an Irish to an Indian feminist context. By August of 1916 Cousins reflected consciously on how "indeed the tragedy and horror of Ireland and all the war has changed and seared us all" as she continued to advocate passive resistance for Ireland, this time however she advocated the use of organized labor as by "far the most effective agent in Ireland both on the physical and mental planes." Notwithstanding her somewhat religious glorification of the 1916 rebellion, Cousins's vision of the way forward for Ireland from there was pragmatic, materialist and not necessarily explicitly nationalist, much less republican. At this point Cousins refused to lose sight of actual human conditions in an abstract nationalism. In July of 1916 it was clearly her view that the Irish womens' cause was not bound to nationalist agendaes although she was also acutely aware of the unpopularity which would outcast the pacifist for a "seeming cowardice" or "nationalist treason" in not following the party grievance list for past wrongs:

It is dreadful to be crucified between the past and the future as we all are, for the wrongs of the past call for redress and revolution but the methods of the present (killing) we who belong to the future seem to be criminal and futile and so on the physical plane we endure the agony of seeming cowardice or nationalist treason or impotence, but yet we must realise that the battle of thought, self-sacrifice and loyalty to idealistic convictions is in the long run doing more for the evolution of all the causes of freedom, human and

national, we have at heart.²³

Cousins urged, for instance that her old hot-headed fellow jail mate, Meg Connery, who was showing perhaps excessive "potency" in her outrage about the British government's executions, to take some of the "glorious unembittered spirit" shown by her lost friends James Connolly, Roger Casement and Francis Sheehy Skeffington. By 1919 however not alone was Cousins realizing exactly how difficult it was going to be to convert "the average man and woman" to the virtues of passive resistance, but she also began to worry about what she saw as its inherent evils of promoting too much passivity in a place such as India where, she implies, passivity was already endemic. As she confided to Hanna:

You have still before you, that is the real fight against militarism, but it is a fight against almost every individual's thought, for the average man and woman still absolutely believes in force and fight, not in passive resistance. I think they will have to practice the principle in the details of their private lives before they think of adhering to it as a national policy. Here there is great hope of that spirit continuing and permeating from here to the West, but it has its own exaggerations and evils in a tendency to acquiesce, submission, a vice of patience....²⁴

²³Cousins to Hanna Sheehy Skeffington, 21 Sept 1916, Sheehy Skeffington Papers, Ms 22,688.

²⁴Cousins to Hanna Sheehy Skeffington, 4 November 1919, Sheehy Skeffington Papers, Ms 22, 688 (ii).

While Cousins's somewhat cynical reservation about passive resistance as no golden strategy reveals on the one hand nothing more than the absence of naivete about the enormity of the challenge it faced, both the long and the short term political contexts of her comments suggest more immediate complications. It was hardly a coincidence that it was in the same year of 1917 that Cousins was hurt to witness what she called the fickleness of the crowd who booed Besant from the platform at the Calcutta Congress in the advent of Gandhi's leadership. Cousins's distancing of herself from the Congress fray here, and the enthusiasm for Gandhian satyagraha (truth-force), echoes Besant's dismissal of passive resistance as dangerously inappropriate for use in what Besant saw as the volatile political tinderbox of an Indian nationalist context from which she, Besant, was being rudely shown the door. Besant felt that Gandhi's touting of passive resistance in his experimental satyagraha campaigns was morally irresponsible in the way that it would almost certainly "unleash" popular violence. So that Cousins's skepticism about Indian crowd control for the "average man and woman" at this point was located in and framed by the strategic imperial policy of disbelief and distrust in the capacity of Indians to contain themselves and by extension, to "constitute" themselves civilly, without master guidance.

That Cousins should express concern about the collusion

of passive resistance with "submission, the vice of patience" in a context where she implicitly posed herself as an inside authority on its Indian testing site is significant for a number of reasons. First because she gives the impression, admittedly here rather more vaguely than elsewhere, that "that spirit" of passive resistance was somehow indigenous to India. Cousins's passage also implies that Indians were already too acquiescent and submissive. Elsewhere about the same year in a published context where Cousins was eager to win favor for herself as a commentator and as a répresentor of "the Indian woman," Cousins celebrated the Indian feminine virtue of "gentle submission" which she cited as peculiar to that population. Also earlier in 1917 Cousins had found herself literally jumping to the rescue of an Indian woman who was being beaten by her husband on a railway platform, an incident which left Cousins aghast at the vast gap between Vedic Indian sexual politics and contemporary versions.

Beyond allowing us to see how in the process of justifying her own position Cousins used "the Indian woman" as a passive foil to her own "gumption," Cousins's hesitations about the use of passive resistance in Indian sexual conflicts make some sense within the terms of her universalist feminist agenda. Just as Cousins had felt frustrated by the complacency of Irish feminist consciousness before her founding of the IWFL in 1907, Cousins's felt likewise in India. While in Ireland however she did not attribute that complacency to

Irish racial characteristics, her implication that what Indian women needed at this point was not more passive resistance but rather a little more fibre, backbone, virility, and active responsibility was rooted in an ahistorical stereotype of oriental femininity. What is interesting therefore about the premises of the style of her intervention in India in 1917, as opposed to in Ireland in 1907, was that she should suddenly attribute Indian women's complacency to racial characteristics - "the Indian quietism" against her own racial characteristics - "the old Irish fighting spirit" - and that she posed herself as "balancing up" the two. While Cousins represented herself in her letters to Ireland as something of a lone "Tarzan" figure to the cause of Indian womanhood, it does not mean that such a self-serving identity of empowerment at the unconscious expense of "the Indian woman" was her sole motivation to action. Nor does it mean that such a role was the sole province of the westerner, or that Indian women did not welcome her intervention nor avail of it to serve various agenda.

As Cousins's proud primary identification was by then as an experienced and indeed almost veteran feminist organizer, whose force Indian publics had not yet had occasion to recognize in their midst, the question was never therefore if she would intervene but rather merely how she would intervene, and crucially, on what issues. And in classical missionary pose Cousins saw it as her unavoidable logical and moral duty

to grasp the moment. Later she would use the Shakespearean image of seizing the moment: "there is a tide in the affairs of men" citing with possible irony the Shakespearean text of Julius Caesar when urging Indian men forward across their Rubicon of sexual politics as a sign of their manly abilities to take back control of the nation. Although she kept "every moment filled up" by taking on the heavy social responsibility of running the very large high school, taking over the secretaryship of the local branch of the Theosophical society and finally, and getting involved with local women's work, she yet confided to Hanna that her heart could not get rid of loneliness and emptiness for her Irish bonds of sisterhood.²⁵

Having served her apprenticeship to a strain of Irish feminism acutely sensitive to perceived attempts at colonization by British feminists, Cousins became a veritable model of the sensitive interlocutor in Indian political affairs. In her published writings Cousins took great pains, and especially in her retrospective autobiography, to cast herself in the role of a catalyst who merely supplied critical direction to a pool of feminist energy already latent within India, speaking of:

a great company of Indian women, who unknown then to me, were awaiting the signal of emancipation. Happily I had no notion of what was pending or of the nature of the signal and the direction from

²⁵Cousins to Hanna Sheehy Skeffington, 4 November 1915, Sheehy Skeffington Papers, Ms 22,688.

which it would come. So none of my own ideas could interfere with whatever was arising out of the inherent genius of Indian womanhood. I simply reacted to the life around me.²⁶

Here Cousins interestingly reverses her terms of engagement with the state which she had used at her Irish Farewell Evening. She said then that if she had been able to achieve anything in Ireland it was because "Ireland reacts to the environment." In India she apparently felt she could take no such chances of admitting herself as an external agent of change, but rather posed herself always as the servant and instrument of indigenous ideas. Cousins would later in the autobiography reflect with some contrived amusement on her earlier mistaken "western assumptions" which led her to despair of any possibility in the improvement in the balance of Indian sexual politics: "My estimate (which I was destined shortly to falsify) was based on a western notion of the age-long subjection of Indian women by their men-folk, and their consequent backwardness."²⁷

One of Cousins's first institutional encounters regarding her work for women's education outside the context of the school in Madanapalle was in June of 1916 when she travelled north to Poona to take her seat as a member of the first

²⁶Cousins and Cousins, 299.

²⁷Cousins and Cousins, 209.

senate of the new Indian Womens' University which had been established by the well known Maharastrian social and educational reformer, Professor D.K. Karve. The curriculum followed a Japanese rather than a Western model where the vernacular languages were prized and English was to be taken as a second language. As a Theosophist it is not surprising that Cousins's contribution was to ensure that comparative religion should be included on the curriculum. The effect of the meeting on Cousins was to make her envious of the "upstanding" women she met there and thus prompted her to take a more active path in reform:

I was delighted to get to know a group of upstanding, intelligent women, who had been helped to social and mental freedom by their saintly Guru, and had gathered around him to help others to the larger life. I was envious of them and envious of the good is a stimulus to good action.²⁸

It was these "upstanding, intelligent" women who first opened Cousins's eyes to the powerful force which certain classes of Indian women could assert in public life, many of whom would form vital contacts for Cousins later: "My work for the women is opening out finely and is giving me great satisfaction. Local events are playing into my hands."²⁹ In Madanapalle Cousins became involved in the already established Madanapalle

²⁸Cousins and Cousins, 278.

²⁹Cousins to Hanna Sheehy Skeffington, 24 November 1916, Sheehy Skeffington Papers, Ms 24,101.

Abala Abhivardini Samaj - "the Weaker Sex Improvement Society" - "an inferiority title that took me some time to get used to."³⁰ On a trip to Burma Cousins encountered the craft of rattan weaving, "learned the method on the spot.. and demonstrated a new art to the Samaj". The classes in rattan weaving spread to the villages near Madanapalle. News of the success of the rattan classes also spread to Cousins's fellow Theosophist at Adyar Dorothy (Graham) Jinarajadasa, another Theosophist originally from Scotland, who was married to Charles Jinarajadasa, a Sinhalese Buddhist.³¹ Jinarajadasa took up the idea for a similar women's group in Madras which came to be called the Women's Indian Association (WIA), with clearly national aspirations it began with seventy members.³² The Women's Indian Association (WIA) was thus founded in Madras in 1917. The aims of the WIA engaged both a liberal individualistic ethic of sexual equality for its own sake with

³⁰Cousins and Cousins, 299.

³¹While both Margaret Cousins and Dorothy Jinarajadasa "founded" the Women's Associations, or rather took over an earlier society called the "society for the improvement of the Weaker Sex", once Cousins moved to teach at Madanapalle it was Jinarajadasa who largely carried the burden of running the affairs of the WIA from headquarters in Madras up to about 1925.

³²An interesting "footnote" in the historiography of the WIA is the frequency with which the founding of the WIA is attributed to Indian women, to Cousins and sometimes to Jinarajadasa. In the May 1929 issue of Stri Dharma, for example, it was declared flatly in the annual report of the WIA that the WIA was founded by none other than Dorothy Jinarajadasa while Margaret Cousins received no mention. Anon., "Annual Report of the WIA" Stri Dharma 12:7 (May 1929):313.

the idea of womens' service to the future nation: (1) To present to women their responsibilities as daughters of India; (2) to secure for every boy and girl the right of education, including religious instruction; (3) to secure the abolition of child marriage and other social evils; (4) to secure for women the vote for Municipal and Legislative Councils on the same terms as it is or may be granted to men; (5) to secure adequate representation of women in Municipalities, Taluks and Local Boards, Legislative Councils and Assemblies; (6) to establish equality of rights and opportunities between men and women; (7) to help women to realise that the future of India lies largely in their hands, or as wives and mothers they have the task of training, guiding and forming the character of the future rulers of India; and (8) to band women into groups for the purpose of self-development and education, and for the definite service of others.

The story of Cousins's interlocution as an Irish woman in Indian feminist politics and reform is best understood by examining how she worked out her theosophical-feminist, nationalist and internationalist program under the ideological and social auspices of the Theosophical Society, and the stormy reputation of Besant. It was after all a Madanapalle Theosophist who first assembled those chosen eighty women for Cousins's review.³³ The WIA made efficient use of its social

³³ Cousins's helpmate in founding the Samaj in 1916 was Seshagiri Rao, a member of Besant's committee which framed the Commonwealth of India Bill and prominent in the Indian

capital within the Theosophical Society to form branches first around South India and then northward, literally writing on the official letterhead of the Theosophical Society.³⁴ By 1922 the WIA had 43 branches and 2,300 members, and by 1927, had 80 branches and 4,000 members. Female relatives of Theosophist men who were often already well known in their communities as pillars of society jumped at the chance to involve themselves more actively in a social and political organization for women. Such women often deplored the "unenlightened" mentalities of their (usually lower caste) sisters. Therefore the initial profile of the WIA needs to be situated in a fomenting political culture textured by Besant's rather awkward association with the Congress from 1916 to 1917, Besant's foundation of her own Home Rule League in 1916, and most importantly in the Theosophical cultural nationalist

Home Rule League. Fifty Years of Madanapalle: Madanapalle Theosophical High School 1888-1938, Special Golden Jubilee Number of The Madanapalle (Madanapalle, 1938):853.

³⁴Cousins explicitly refers to "the distinct Theosophical influence" on the WIA in "The Awakening of the Women of India," The Theosophist (December 1937):232. For examples of how Cousins's feminist networking was facilitated by her Theosophical connections see for instance letters such as the following: "My wife believes that you are such a good soul that any services rendered to you confer upon you thousand fold returns. We shall always be glad to receive theosophical workers like you and Mrs Jinarajadasa and others." K.S. Gopalarahnam Aiyar, Sub-Judge, Tanjore to Cousins, 11 Sept 1921, AIWC Papers, File 2, 1922-1932. A much different response came from Bengal where Rumindini Basu reported that women would not come to meetings as they were indifferent to women's emancipation and harbored suspicions of the Theosophical influence. Rumindini Basu to Cousins, 6 April 1923, AIWC Papers, Ibid.

agenda of social reform which was rooted in a Hindu fundamentalist vision which privileged a golden age of Vedic Indian civilization. Owing to its original incubation in the Theosophical Society the WIA tended inevitably to attract Brahman and "Brahmanizing" middle class non-Brahmins such as for example Muthulakshmi Reddy, one of the WIA's most active articulators of social reform in Madras. The Brahman political elite of Madras Presidency was concentrated in the Mylapore area of Madras conveniently adjacent to the Theosophical headquarters in Adyar. Most Indian members of the Theosophical Society in Madras were also Brahmans of Mylapore. It was at a meeting in Mylapore of Theosophical members that the Congress was first conceived and organized in 1884. The romantic all Indian nationalist agenda of the Congress shared the same cultural pride in the notion of an ancient revivable Vedic/Sanskritic culture which Theosophists supported. The Theosophical Society supplied Sanskritic reading material for local Theosophists in their richly orientalist library. Besant's attempt to sponsor a neo-classical Sanskritic Indian renaissance was sharply contested by the Tamil non-Brahman political movement whose Dravidian heritage, along with their contemporary access to power, was being marginalized by the Mylapore Brahmans. That the Brahmanizing use of selective Hindu ideology for the reform of sexual politics was more conservative than progressive was noted in 1926 when another non-Brahman social reformer, Periyar, founded an off-shoot

Tamil "Self Respect movement" with a feminist democratic agenda which appealed plaintively against the oppressive female body politics of purity of a conservative Sanskritizing Brahmanism. The strident Theosophical note in the Brahmanistic vision (and vice versa) was not lost on non-Brahman politicians who termed Besant "the Irish Brahmani."³⁵

It is no accident then that many of the stated aims of the WIA replicated a specifically Sanskritizing, or caste climbing, agenda for "the Indian woman" and that it should identify itself as a national organization which, by definition, took no notice of Dravidian inspired or indeed other regional cultural identities which could potentially threaten its legitimacy to represent all Indian women.

Besant was honored as the first president of the WIA most likely in a bid to have her formidable blessing within the Theosophical Society and all its facilities. The honor also served Besant's political reputation for progressive reform, as well as securing for the WIA the good associations of the Theosophical values where they went uninterrogated.³⁶ And of

³⁵Cousins's (and the WIA's) links with the (non-Brahmin) Justice Party seem to have been limited to the issue of this suffrage legislation.

³⁶A letter to Dorothy Jinarajadasa from women in Rangoon, Burma asking Jinarajadasa to be their WIA branch president comments that "the Theosophical Society from the first, saw the nobility and greatness of the functions of women in the social organism, and the large numbers of lady Theosophists is witness of the awakening throughout the world, of the conscience to the worth of womanhood. We know that along with your leader Mrs Annie Besant you have devoted your time to the sacred cause of giving your sisters

course Besant presented a good role model of an empowered woman despite, as well as perhaps because of her canonization as male, by such as the Madanapalle students. In fact Cousins herself later cited Besant as an example of a woman who had "carried over" many masculine pasts into her present incarnation, and was therefore living proof of a highly evolved being, while Bengali cultural revivalist Rabindranath Tagore represented Besant's sexual corollary.³⁷

However, despite the nominal support of Besant, and her eternal readiness to loan her name to any movement likely to win her the acclaim of liberal enlightened elites in the Congress and elsewhere, she shrank from making feminist politics a plank in the agenda of her Home Rule League when Cousins asked her to do so in 1917. Just as the Irish Parliamentary Party had done in Cousins's Irish experience, as Cousins was herself quick to note. Although apart from a vague comment to Hanna of how "political matters are as bad as anywhere else and much on the same lines as at home," she appears to have kept the comparison to herself until writing her autobiography in the late forties, a safe fifteen years or so after Besant's death:³⁸

a real place in the social arrangements. Secretary of Rangoon branch of the WIA to Dorothy Jinarajadasa, Rangoon Gazette 11 September 1926.

³⁷Cousins, "Without Distinction of Sex," Theosophist (December 1918):212-223.

³⁸Cousins to Hanna Sheehy Skeffington, 22 June 1918, Ms 24,102.

The antipathy of the Irish parliamentary party to the claim of votes for women, on the grounds that it would go against the main cause of freedom, was paralleled by the refusal of Mrs Besant to make votes for Indian women a plank in the platform of her Home Rule League.³⁹

Again in 1950 Cousins sharply commented on how the Women's Home Rule League which Besant formed in 1918 was "an expedient for getting the support of women for the political movement without committing the League to votes for women."⁴⁰ Cousins could clearly see through Besant's political machinations. Yet she maintained both public and private respect for Besant as the head of the Theosophical Society and as a sort of mother figure to herself and the "cause". In 1924 however Cousins confronted Besant aggressively on the issue of her sexist nomenclature in the title of one of her Theosophical sub-organizations, "the Brothers of Service." The title stimulated that "risibility" which Cousins always proudly attributed to herself retrospectively when she recalled herself standing up to authority, and "ultimately" her "pugnacity."

My audible objection to the outmoded primacy of masculine terminology was met from one side by a dull acceptance of whatever came from above, and from another side by the argument that such terms as brother and brethren had become inclusive of both sexes. I met this kow-towing to male convention in the opening of "the day of the woman"

³⁹Cousins and Cousins, 331.

⁴⁰Cousins and Cousins, 332.

by emphasizing the subtle effect that false and inadequate terms exercised on mental states and through them on action....Two days later Mrs Besant called me to her room. At the end of a long, stiff interview she said she would not change the name, but she would take me in as a full "brother", so that, as she put it, I might keep them straight on a matter that certainly had its importance.⁴¹

And there Cousins leaves that point of contention and all other points of conflict with Besant, at least in her published reminiscences. At the time however she published her position in the Theosophist explaining her concept of the social "bristerhood," where just as in her bi-sexual, androgynous notion of the "femaculine" of every individual, she emphasized here the bisexual nature of the social collectivity as well, which she felt the falsely lop-sided term "brotherhood" misrepresented.⁴²

It is interesting then that in August of 1924 Cousins wrote a tribute to Besant in which she painted Besant's career as consistently feminist, and more importantly she portrayed Besant as a deeply maternal woman whose children had been removed from her care only because of Besant's maternalist work: "to lighten the burdens of an overworked motherhood... she paid the price in the removal from her care of these same

⁴¹Cousins and Cousins, 301.

⁴²Cousins, "Without Distinction of Sex," Theosophist (December 1918):212-223; "Woman's Contribution to Brotherhood," Theosophist (October 1923):33-35. The term "brotherhood" was also derived, as Cousins was well aware, from the masonic mottoism of the French Revolution.

loved little ones."⁴³ The idea of the feminist activist's replacement of actual motherhood by a metaphoric maternalist activist practice validated Cousins's own sense of her maternal identity as an activist and helped explain Cousins's own odd non-mother status in social contexts overdetermined by expectations of motherhood for women.

Cousins also sheltered under Besant's pioneering reputation in public moments of vulnerability. When Cousins was appointed in 1923 as what she lauded as "the first woman magistrate in India," to the bench of Saidapet district in Madras, to mark her non-Britishness she cited Besant along with Sister Nivedita (Margaret Noble) of Vivekenanda's mission in Bengal, as her fellow country women in whose saintly footsteps into Indian public life she was merely following:

For myself, my best service for the welfare of the Indian society will constitute my continuous gratitude for the honor I feel that I, only a follower in the footsteps of my fellow country-women, Annie Besant and Sister Nivedita, should have been chosen by the powers, temporal and spiritual, to be the first woman to dispense justice in modern times in this most ancient and holy land.⁴⁴

It is interesting to note how Cousins publicly approached the

⁴³Cousins, "Tribute to Annie Besant," Adyar Bulletin (August 1924):24-25.

⁴⁴Cousins, "Presidential Address to Ninth Session of Mysore State Women's Conference," Stri Dharma 13:3 (January 1935):104.

vulnerability of her whiteness and foreignness in the days before she had an opportunity to establish an individualized public image. In one of Cousins's rare comments on her whiteness she shows how she was sensitive to accelerating racial tensions in 1920:

Still race feeling is becoming very pronounced in India and I expect the atmosphere will some day become so uncomfortable that white people will not be able to live here except by special invitation. Such is the strongest trend of things.⁴⁵

Cousins used various strategies to dodge being racially or politically stereotyped, delighting in how her chameleonic facility to combine diverse identities and multiple cultural positions appeared to confound the rigid categorizations of fellow foreigners whom she neatly sectarianized:

Some days were queer mixtures: on one Sunday I dictated an article in my bedroom to an orthodox Brahmin, had tea out with Hindu lady-friends, came home to give tea to some of the local Indian Catholics, went to the Protestant church and revelled in the rich Dublin brogue of the new padre whose sermon contained a funny story and such flavorful phrases as "surely to goodness." I was, I gathered, quite an enigma to the various local sections. The Catholics couldn't understand how an

⁴⁵Cousins wrote to Hanna: "It is strange how I have become such a school-marm in India. My own university and school careers have come in very useful to me and "gumption" and powers of organization do the rest. Mrs Pethick Lawrence has written me several long letters lately so I feel in touch with the old spirit still and it's a good spirit." Cousins to Hanna Sheehy Skeffington, 2 June 1920, Sheehy Skeffington Papers, Ms 22, 691.

Irishwoman could be both a Protestant and a Home Ruler. The Protestants couldn't understand why I was not a missionary. The European club couldn't understand how I could be so jolly and yet be a vegetarian - and a follower of Mrs. Besant!⁴⁶

Shortly after her arrival in India however, Cousins related to Hanna an incident where an Indian speaker deeply disturbed her by claiming her as "one of their own":

A good Indian tried to grab me publicly in a speech for India, saying he was sure that though on the surface I was Irish in my heart I was Indian. It would have rejoiced you all to have felt how every atom of me protested against the idea. I had to laugh afterwards at the thought of the strength of my race adherence. Nationalists in every country are selfish, I suppose, but while I remain intensely Irish I have no desire to annex any Indians and claim them as Irish because they happen to sympathise or even if need be serve Ireland. What a queer place the world is and the people in it!⁴⁷

Here Cousins felt that her Irishness was not respected or taken seriously as a valid nationality in its own right and could be loaned out indiscriminately to every and any nationalist cause. Besant also always made a point of reducing the Cousineses to little more than a symbol of the Irishness which Besant persistently invested with racial characteristics

⁴⁶Cousins and Cousins, 377.

⁴⁷Cousins to Hanna Sheehy Skeffington, 4 November 1919, Sheehy Skeffington Papers, Ms 22,688 (ii).

of dreaminess and "almost Indianess." In Besant's imagination Ireland also represented a land of ancient spiritual mysticism which might lend itself to the internationalist project of Theosophy as a future European depot of Adyar. While Cousins was indeed always eager to "remain intensely Irish" the issue seems to have subsided as she found her own feet in India independently of Besantite platforms. Gandhi also made less point of Cousins's "non-Indianess" than Besant did, and he certainly patronized Cousins less. Henceforth Cousins confined her references to her Irishness to moments of perceived vulnerability when she was spotlighted for public attention as a non-Indian leader of Indian women.

Throughout the early 1920s Cousins was hedging her bets between the Adyar and Congress franchises of the nation. In retrospect one can judge how Cousins skillfully tacked a course from 1917 which allowed her the benefit of association with both camps. At the time however her moves were more in the style of an almost blindly principled savant, where the message often organized the means. Her anxieties around passive resistance were situated in what can be interpreted in retrospect as her personal power vacuum as she manoeuvred between using Besant's New India as her mouthpiece and more discretely Gandhi's Young India, in order to reach audiences which her own WIA journal Stri Dharma, meaning perhaps the

"Over Determined Way of Truth" might miss.⁴⁸

A central contention in Indian nationalist - imperial politics of the interwar period was whether or not "the Indian" was fit for self-rule. The huge amount of reflective literature on the identity of "the Indian woman" generated in the 1920s and 1930s, by Indian women and others, such as Cousins, variously concocted "the Indian woman" as a measure of her man's civility. What I want to show in Cousins's twenty five year long symbolic representation of the Indian woman from 1917 to 1942 are the conditions under which she styled a changing mesh of western liberal individualist argument with her orientalist belief and/or strategic manipulation of the popular essentialism of "Mother India." What needs to be teased out in Cousins's case is how she developed a perspective, instituted it, organized it and propagated it, which manipulated the anxieties of various constituencies such as: British rulers including British feminists of various political persuasions; Congress; internationalist feminists

⁴⁸By 1926 Cousins was using Gandhi's Young India to reach an audience on the question of child marriage reform which Stri Dharma could not and then used that citation in Stri Dharma again in 1930. She had also stopped writing her weekly column for New India in 1925. Cousins knew the value of timely communication with M.K. Gandhi himself editor of Young India. In Stri Dharma of 1926 his enraged article against child marriage, triggered by some notes sent him by Cousins after a thirteen year old wife was burned to death in Madras "owing to the unbearable and inhuman solicitations of the so-called [26 year old] husband" was copied from Young India. M. K. Gandhi, "The Curse of Child Marriage" (reprinted from Young India August, 1926) Stri Dharma XIII, no.9 (July, 1930), 390.

and concerned western liberals in the USA.

In this, Cousins, like everybody else, reworked many of the old representational arguments of imperial-national debates. Cousins's striking of various rhetorical poses in her variously pointed addresses to British men and women, Indian men and Indian women, and North American women and men, after the surprising suffrage triumph, shows how she was quite prepared to loan out the name of the Indian woman to nationalist vested interests in return for their support in uplifting the image of the Indian woman.

Cousins first engaged with the woman's cause at the national level in 1917. While Cousins had hoped that the war would bring the Irish women suffrage "quicker than anything else" it never seems to have occurred to her to use the same leverage for Indian women's franchise - as she herself would admit later:

In my own heart I thought it would be a century before Indian women would understand, or be interested in political matters. I entirely under-rated Indian mentality in that second year of my residence in India. I have since learnt to judge nothing in this ancient and wise country by a standard of ordinary Western values of vaunted literacy.⁴⁹

Although at the time of writing her autobiography in the 1940s Cousins could accommodate alternative definitions of literacy

⁴⁹Cousins, Indian Womanhood Today (Allahabad: Kitabistan, 1941):34.

apart from "the ordinary Western values" of reading and writing ability, yet in the 1920s Cousins felt that improving the literacy rates and access to education among Indian women was the first step to emancipation. Cousins's position was partially inspired by a feminist internationalist perspective which graphed periodic improvements in such global statistics intensively. That India fell so far down the list on the literacy graph bothered Cousins as a "stain" on the reputation of the Indian nation and thus provided her with a practical challenge for reform which would be applauded generally by reform-minded Indians. Cousins's primary reformist goal therefore from the beginnings of her intervention in India was to redress the focus of Indian educational system toward what she felt were "indigenous" needs, and concomitantly, to unblock the path of education to women. The opportunity to open a suffragist campaign, much less the relatively easy suffragist achievement which she at least portrayed, was the furthest thing from her mind in 1917.

In 1917 Cousins read in the newspaper of the forthcoming tour of India by British Secretary of State for India, Edwin P. Montagu and Viceroy, Lord Chelmsford to survey the ripeness of various constituents for an expanded electorate. It was in Cousins's (retrospective) view all part of "Queen Victoria's long announced goal of self-government for India." Cousins's initial plan of campaign was not to ask for votes for women but rather to address the subject of equalizing educational

opportunities for both sexes - her targeted Besantite mission of the moment. When Cousins applied to have such a deputation received which would state the claim for an extension of girls' education her request was refused on the grounds that it was a matter outside the terms of the enquiry which extended only to electoral reforms. On James Cousins's suggestion Cousins then proceeded to request for a deputation to be heard on the question of votes for women, recalling with some fascination later how the repressed and marginalized idea of the suffrage became uncannily centralized again as the "point of vantage" to be pressed. In the autobiography later Cousins recalled the event of her creation of the suffrage speech as far more epic than her previous militance because, in her view, she was after all pioneering the idea in India:

The big hurdle was the address, and that was put in front of me. I can tell anybody who wants to know, that to have your finger on a turning point in the history of a vast country is no matter of light refreshments. A month in Holloway jail and another in Tullamore seemed, in retrospect, rest cures compared with the brain-racking job of having to formulate a demand without precedent in the long history of India, a demand far past the understanding of all but the minutest fraction of those of those for whom it was to be made, and likely to have their opposition as well as that of men of orthodox and conventional mind. Opposition didn't scare me. What worried me was my ignorance of the colossal reality of India. I was a mere two years in the country. In my occasional excursions I had got glimpses into humanity and history. From our Dublin studies in Indian philosophy Jim and I had acquired our ideal view of individual and collective life; but had been sane enough to expect

no nearer an approach to the Upanishads on the Mount in the tenement streets of Dublin. But the ideal persisted and sometimes led me into queer corners. Centuries of social degeneration lay between the superb marriage ideals and practice of Vedantic India and the railway platform at the pilgrimage station of Tirupati where I saw a big man beat his little wife. The inhumanity, the un-Indianness of it, hauled me like a streak of lightning out of my compartment into a protest that was a mixture of indignation on behalf of outraged womanhood and a lecture on the Vedantic relationship of man and woman....I had to balance up my perhaps exaggerated fighting spirit with the Indian quietism when I came to the point of drafting the first requests for votes for Indian women.⁵⁰

It is also interesting that here Cousins's stream of thought should run so fluently from her naivete about the colossal reality of India, to her persistent search for the ideal life in ancient Indian Vedic culture, to a resume of her qualifications to interfere in the shocking degeneration of the contemporary Indian race, which aroused in her that "native" fighting spirit which she was then forced to muzzle down in line with "the Indian quietism." Perhaps it is only understandable that Cousins felt the need to legitimize her intervention. There is also a sense however in which Cousins was being forced to confront her idealistic sentimentality at the train station, but her indignant loyalty to the feminist cause prevented her from having to acknowledge that naivete because she had herself so convinced of both it and its function as a justification for the good cause of reviving the

⁵⁰Cousins, We Two Together, 310.

ideal, "collective life." Such well placed naivete must also have precluded any cynical colleagues from pointing out that the Vedic emperor and empress were also naked, although anyway it would have fallen on deaf ears.

And then Cousins handed over her brilliant address to Sarojini Naidu, who as Cousins wrote, read the address -

as if she herself was composing it as she went along. There was no reply; but four members of the deputation were given private interviews: I being only the Secretary, was not one of them.⁵¹

When the Montagu-Chelmsford scheme of reforms was published however there was no mention of votes for women. In April 1919 when the report of the Southborough Franchise Committee, which had been enquiring into the subject of the woman's suffrage also omitted any promise of votes for women, regarding it as a premature move for India, and citing the obstacles of purdah restrictions on Muslim women, Cousins immediately sent a cable to London in protest. In every province protest meetings were held, either organized by the WIA, or other women's organizations such as the Women's Graduate Unions, Women's Home Rule League or the Bharata Stree Mandal (the Great Circle of Indian Women). Cousins wrote in June of 1918 to Hanna Sheehy Skeffington of how the British government was holding back the suffrage while Indians were supportive of it:

⁵¹Ibid., 314.

The movement for Woman Suffrage in India is making rapid strides but it is wrapped up with all reform activity here, in the feeling of beating the air, for only the Home Parliament has the power to make any of those changes and it is almost impossible to get at close quarters to it. In many ways Indians are more tolerant of women doing what they show themselves capable of than are Westerners.

The Southborough Committee reported that "it would be out of harmony with the conservative feeling of the country" and postponed the issue while noting that one committee member, Mr Hogg, had recorded no opposition to the idea in India as well as "no general demand for it."⁵³ The report's representation of "an absence of general demand for the suffrage" provoked a storm of protest from the Women's Indian Association. It was Cousins who set immediately to a brilliant strategic public relations campaign detailing the repeated prominence of the suffrage issue in various legislative council meetings, summarizing the demands of the women's organizations for suffrage and the work which they had accomplished to date. She detailed how two years previously at the Calcutta Congress a resolution for woman suffrage appeared for the first time on the agenda but was not discussed owing to lack of time; how at the Bombay Provincial Congress a resolution on suffrage was

⁵² Cousins to Hanna Sheehy Skeffington, 22 June 1918, Sheehy Skeffington Papers, MS 24,102.

⁵³ Southborough Committee Report, May 1919, India Office Library and Records, L/ Proceedings and Journals (Reforms) 267/19,

passed unanimously; likewise in the Madras Provincial Conference of April 1918; the Provincial Congress Committees of Punjab; the Central Provinces; United Provinces and at the Executive meeting of the Indian Home Rule League in October 1918.⁵⁴ Cousins's letter was supported by a letter from Muthulakshmi Reddi who forwarded to Montagu the exact wording of the resolutions passed unanimously by the All India Home Rule Leagues, Brahmo Samaj and the Neo-Fabian Societies.⁵⁵ In July 1919 she wrote again to Montagu underlining her legitimacy as the spokesperson of "the Indian ladies" and appealing to the protective codes of honor and chivalry of the individual members of the Reforms Committee:

The Indian ladies tell me to say that they look to each Member of the Joint Committee as to a protector of their sex's honour and as an upholder of their modestly-made but deeply desired claim for citizen rights with which to serve their country.⁵⁶

And Cousins reminded English women suffragists and parliamentarians of their particular responsibility to Indian women; "you are their champions and advocates at home," as she urged them to publicize the Congress resolution against having

⁵⁴Cousins, on behalf of WIA, Madras, to Rt. Hon. E.S. Montagu, M.P., 4 June 1919, India Office Library and Records (hereafter IOLR), L/Pand J (Reforms) 267/19.

⁵⁵ S. Muthulakshmi Reddi to Rt. Hon. E.S. Montagu, M.P, 12 June 1919, IOLR, LP and J (Reforms) 267/19.

⁵⁶Cousins, on behalf of WIA to Montagu, J and P (Reforms) 5 July 1919, IOLR, 360/1919 with File J and P (Reforms) 267/19.

the subject dealt with by a special committee rather than by open discussion in the House of Commons, as the committee with one exception, as she pointed out, was already openly opposed to woman suffrage for India.⁵⁷

For instance, a long resonant perception of Theosophists as troublesome nuisance factors in Indian national-imperial politics was raised in England by Constance Villiers Stewart, secretary of the Indian Women's Educational Association (IWEA). On behalf of the IWEA she joined with the National Union of Women's Suffrage Societies in a petition of the British administration to support the interests of the Aga Khan, who, from Paris, advocated "the inclusion of some Indian women in the proposed electorates for British India." Villiers Stuart recommended that some Indian women be drawn from the elite ranks of landowners and graduates. In a circular addressed to Sir James Dunlop Smith, Villiers Stuart states the case of a British conservative resentment towards giddy, interfering Theosophists who would transpose democracy uncritically to a country such as India:

because the Indian ladies' natural leaders the Begans and Maharanis, cannot very well move in a British Indian matter (and everything is left in the hands of Mrs Besant and her extremists)....It would be a great advantage to include some ladies, from what I know of them they would be much less likely to be taken in by extreme western ideas

⁵⁷Cousins to Millicent Fawcett of National Union of Women's Suffrage Societies, 30 October 1918, Fawcett Collection, Fawcett Library.

which suit neither the climate nor the feeling of the country. So I particularly want the support of those who really know the conservative feeling of India as a whole, and to avoiding if I can, Theosophists, and those who "love India" without much knowledge.⁵⁸

In July of 1919 Annie Besant, Sarojini Naidu and Lady Tata of Bombay travelled to London to lobby for the vote there and to speak to women's associations in England, whereupon the Joint Select Committee decided to leave the question of the women's franchise to be settled by the future Legislative Councils of India for each province, and decided that the franchise for the university seats would be extended to all graduates of over seven years standing including women.⁵⁹ The British administrators in effect washed their hands of the issue leaving it up to Indian men themselves. The responses of Indian men to the woman's suffrage question is very much under researched but as it really only accounted for about one million women out of a population of three hundred million, there was little formidable opposition.

The Travancore and Cochin assemblies in states outside of British India having already passed the resolution, Cousins then set to ensuring that the Madras Presidency would follow suit as she appealed to the Legislative Council on behalf of

⁵⁸Constance Villiers Stuart to Sir James Dunlop Smith, 6 December 1918; and joint petition of Indian Women's Educational Association and National Union of Women's Suffrage Societies, 12 December 1918; L/P&J/ R267/19 IOLR, London.

⁵⁹Cousins and Cousins, 378.

the by then forty branches of the WIA, requesting them to vote in support of the resolution to be moved in March of 1921. M. Krishnan Nayar of the Justice Party moved the resolution and it was passed in Madras unanimously.⁶⁰ Gradually over the succeeding years each of the major Legislative assemblies granted the vote to women after much educational and political propaganda by the various women's organizations which Cousins played a central role in stimulating. Cousins remembered in the late 1940s:

To this day I retain the memory of the deep thrill of pride that went through me when I heard or read the speeches of the various members of the legislatures from firstly in Madras in 1921 to finally Behar in 1929 in support of woman suffrage.⁶¹

In Stri Dharma and New India Cousins profusely celebrated India's political advancement on the suffrage issue as evidence of its advanced state of enlightenment over the West. While Cousins strategically promoted the image of the liberal Indian man to the world arena of colonial chauvinism her rhetoric was also expertly designed to flatter the Indian male

⁶⁰In 1924-25 Assam Council and Punjab Government passed the vote for women and also permitted women to seek election. In 1926-27 women took great interest in the General Election and women had votes in Madras, Bombay, U.P., Assam, Burmah, Punjab, Delhi, Bengal and the C.P and Bihar.

⁶¹Cousins and Cousins, 389.

as a modern emancipationist; to put pressures of expectation on him to follow through on his apparently liberated feminist agenda now that he had shown the world how "naturally enlightened" he was:

We recalled that it was just three years and three months since the first claim for the vote was presented in India to the Government....It took Great Britain eighty years to agree to the justice of women's claim. Madras Presidency has come to the same decision in three years though it has a population and extent equal to the former. It is good, very good, that Indian men have at the very outset agreed that Self-government can best proceed by the mutual aid of the men and women of the country together.⁶²

Cousins linked the question of Indian woman's suffrage to British anxieties about empire, revealing both a sensitive and a popular reading of sexual politics of empire which deserves quoting in full:

Had the question of recognizing Indian women on terms of political equality with men rested on the decision of the British parliament, the enfranchisement of women would have been postponed on every kind of misrepresentation and ignorance

⁶²Cousins, "Impressions of Women's Life in North India," Stri Dharma 4:3 (Mar 1921):9-16."In granting woman suffrage Indian men showed great statesmanship....to take a great progressive step unknown to their previous political history. Perhaps only women like myself who have suffered from the cruelties, the injustices of the men politicians in England and Ireland while we waged our militant campaign for eight years there after having tried all peaceful and constitutional means for fifty previous years, could fully appreciate the wisdom, nobility and the passing of fundamental tests in Self-Government of these Indian legislators." Cousins, Indian Womanhood Today, 36.

and prejudice. It had been almost an article of faith in Great Britain that the East had a harem idea about its women. Those who worked for woman suffrage in Britain were constantly being confronted with the argument that if women were given votes in the Mother of Parliaments, her "great Dependency" would lose respect for her authority! Marquis Curzon was one of those who so hammered this idea into the English politicians that it is not too great an assumption to say that they thought they were quite safe from the possibility of political freedom for Indian women through giving power into the hands of Indians themselves to deal with the question, and this especially as the two Indians who had been on the Southborough Franchise Commission had opposed the extension of the vote to women. In the Montagu-Chelmsford Scheme, Sir Sankaran Nair had been the only supporter in high circles. How little they knew of the spirit of the educated Indians, and of the veneration which is accorded to Indian women!⁶³

The obstinacy of the English political mind in this matter of free political rights for women is incredible! It must wriggle and haggle over the thing as a dog worries about a bone! How immensely superior and more dignified has been the attitude of Indian politicians to this matter in the Provinces where it has come up - with the exception of Bengal!⁶⁴

Cousins was also quick to rap the knuckles of the nationalist Swaraj party of Bengal who were obstructing the passing of the women's reforms. Cousins drew the attention of Swarajists to the Irish suffragist parallel saying that when the Irish Home Rule party sought to throw overboard the claims of the Irish women in similar circumstances the women there had said there

⁶³Cousins, Mus.Bac. Hon. Magistrate "What Women have gained by the Reforms" National Conference Series Pamphlet No.7 Besant Press, Madras, 1923.

⁶⁴Cousins, "At Home and Abroad," New India 2 December 1918.

was no logic in denying freedom in order to achieve freedom - "The Swaraj party is not dealing fairly by their women supporters and they will reap bad karma from their misuse of power."⁶⁵ Cousins's clairvoyantly veteran authoritative tone was often hardly to be helped and was rarely in itself the cause of any antagonism toward her politics.

While one battle was won however the "feminist war" had barely begun, but the suffrage victory kickstarted Cousins's propaganda machine as she made the most of the suffrage success to raise "the Indian woman" high on those international graphs of liberation and progress, while also, domestically, using the political success to rally support for other non-suffrage reforms. Cousins never missed an opportunity to connect advances in national reforms to more general planetary spiritual trends as for instance in an obituary tribute to pioneering feminist reformer Ramabai Ranade in May 1924 which conveys something of the mood, charisma and rhetoric Cousins felt the task required, as well as her strategic conviction that a generational time-spirit of sexual reform was just catching on in the East and must be promptly grasped:

A new day had dawned over the Earth and we of this generation are the daughters of the morning. Our talk is so sublime, so splendid with the

⁶⁵Cousins, "Women at Home and Abroad," New India, 24 May 1924.

possibilities of realization, that we may well look into one another's eyes with faith and with a challenge. Have we the courage, the fortitude, the comradeship, the pluck to do this thing now, though in earlier days it would have been impossible. The political situation over the counter offers an extraordinary opportunity. One half of the population newly-enfranchised, a new party, perhaps threatening the more conservative organisations, all in a state of flux and more or less confusion. But an opportunity must be grasped or it is quickly dissipated. Will we grasp it and place humanity on a straight road toward an enduring civilization or shall we fail in this crisis? The task is arduous; petitions to be signed, members to be secured, resolutions, meetings, interviewing members of Congress. It is dull, tedious, uninspiring. Yet upon this very mundane work depends the success of the feminist movement. It is upon you and upon me, upon all of us who see the vision, that the burden rests. Will we take it up dauntlessly, as those who went before carried our burden for us?....Daughters of the morning! Above our heads stretches the wide arch of the open sky, rosy with the dawn; if we hearken, we shall hear the voices of the children of the future pleading with us for their heritage. Again we pledge our faith, "Failure is impossible!"

⁶⁶Cousins, New India, 10 May 1924.

CHAPTER 5

WRITING INDIA TO THE WORLD; EDUCATING INDIA

Cousins always viewed the international and the national reform campaigns working in concentric fashion. Cousins's primary role in feminist politics at the national level, as before in her Irish days in the IWFL, was as a kind of self-appointed liaison and public relations officer cum journalist between the WIA and what she framed as a world audience. In addition to her many articles in Theosophical journals on themes such as music, aesthetics and philosophy, Cousins was also a regular contributor from about 1918 to a range of Indian newspapers, from Besant's New India, and Commonweal to the Times of India, Tomorrow, and of course, Stri Dharma, the organ of the WIA, which she edited. The style of Cousins's explicitly feminist political writing in this period differs markedly from her more explicitly Theosophical writings in its deliberately simple and logoistic formulae, as though she may have been quite unsure of her audience but was reaching out to the widest audience possible, both western and Indian. Although her writing was now much more soaked in spiritual metaphors than was generally evident in Ireland, she sensibly kept her abundant and deeply thoughtful, serious Theosophical

language quite clear of her overtly public practical feminist concerns, highlighting her tremendous facility to write in very different registers for different audiences.

Cousins established Stri Dharma in English, Tamil and Telegu in 1918 "as a broadcasting medium for news about the women's movement in India to other countries as it has exchanges with almost all important feminist papers in English and French. Thus are the bonds of international sisterhood forged."¹ It was crucial to Cousins that Indian women should keep abreast of women's progress abroad and vice versa in order to prod them to "keep up", as well as to celebrate those special characteristics which complemented them to western women.

With her first hand experience of Irish suffragism at the geographical heart of the empire Cousins felt compelled to position herself as a vital link in a global network of

¹Cousins, "Sir Sankaran Nair and the Women's Movement," Stri Dharma 10:11 (September 1927):162. Similarly in The Awakening of Asian Womanhood Cousins drew a "pen picture" of various leading Indian women. One such figure was Ramabai Ranade, wife of Lord Justice Ranade, and founder of an educational institution for married women in Maharashtra. Ranade's feminism had been inspired by Pandita Ramabai, the late nineteenth century Maharashtrian feminist: [Cousins] "asked her: 'What do you think of the future of women in India?'. 'It is full of hope and promise' she replied, and in doing so spontaneously took my hand and pressed it. It touches a Westerner when her Eastern sister does that. It bridges and knits the human sisterhood together." Cousins, Awakening of Asian Womanhood (Madras:Ganesh, 1922):109. Cousins apparently made efforts to learn Hindi but never felt herself proficient in any Indian language.

progressive feminism as she communicated Indian woman's news via remote satellite to the metropolitan West, just as she had earlier been the liaison officer between the IWFL and the WSPU. Apart from legitimizing her intervention in Indian politics, an active role in feminist internationalism was important to Cousins in its own right and it served her on a number of deeper levels. The Theosophical cultural relativist vision of a globally united network of nations - a global "unity in diversity" - gave Cousins that niche from which she could feel connected to a universal good cause which for her was always in the process of unfolding.

In 1922, seven years after her arrival in India, Cousins published the first of her four books, The Awakening of Asian Womanhood.² Here Cousins joyously describes for non-Indians how the "Time-Spirit" was effecting a wave of feminist consciousness across Asia, without claiming any originary source for it. The book was also the product of a need felt by her Madras publishers, as well as by herself, to define the realities of "Asian womanhood" to the misinformed West. Cousins distinguished herself as an authority against various other "orientalists who demolish (in books researched in three weeks) the inscrutability of the oriental mind", which, by a curious twist of neo-orientalism, Cousins insisted, is and

²Cousins, The Awakening of Asian Womanhood (Madras: Ganesh, 1922).

ever more will be, inscrutable.³ The book was requested by the publishers Ganesh and Company in Madras and the bulk of the chapters had already appeared as articles in newspapers such as the Times of India, Stri Dharma, Tomorrow, and Britain and India.⁴

Appropriately committed to exposing the orientalist myth of "the Indian woman," Cousins tried her own hand at reconstructing the complex "realities" of "Indian womanhood". While virulently sensitive to orientalist misrepresentations of "the Indian woman," Cousins herself, acting as a fellow colonial insider, was convinced that she could at least know the Indian woman better than any other outsider and possibly even better than many of them knew themselves.

This her first book is noticeable for the lengths to which Cousins goes to point up the great diversity of Asian and Indian women as she found them differing according to class/caste and regional culture. She noticed for instance how

³Cousins, New India 24 March 1924.

⁴Following his citation of Gladstone's comment that: "When we are seeking to ascertain the measure of that conception which any given race has formed of our nature, there is perhaps no single test so effective as the position which it assigns to women," T.S. Rajagopal in his book, Indian Women in the New Age, cited what to him was apparently Cousins's authoritative assessment in The Awakening of Asian Womanhood that "the women of India are the most fettered and cramped in the world today," and also that "they are entirely ignorant of those large interests of humanity, a just comprehension of which alone entitles them to the dignity of citizenship." T.S. Rajagopal, Indian Women in the New Age (Mysore City: 1936), 215.

in predominantly agricultural areas there was a spirit of mutual respect and friendliness - "an attitude quite different from that of masculine industrial centres, or of the higher grades of society where women are too often treated as parasites only."⁵

It is part of the paradox of India that the women of the laboring classes are amongst the freest in the world. They seem to know no fear, they are merry, kindly, healthy, companionable, self-reliant, and where piece-work rates are in question, they are given a free field and no favour.⁶

Although Cousins was quite conscious of class inequality she never presumed to have all the answers for class reform in India, nor anywhere else, but pushed instead for practical solutions to ease the burden of working mothers such as the institution of "cradle homes" for their babies.⁷ Earlier in 1916 she had commented to Hanna Sheehy Skeffington on how "the lower caste women have a fine time and as far as I can see

⁵Cousins, New India 24 May 1924.

⁶For a typical example of the rhythm of Cousins's rhetorical style see her article "The Women's Movement in India Today" New India 28 August 1926.

⁷Cousins: "for the millions of women in India who work in factories, mines and tea and coffee estates the problem of what to do with their babies and very young children during their work hours" is solved by cradle homes." Cousins, "At Home and Abroad," New India 5 January 1924.

seem better off than the same class of Irishwomen."⁸ Cousins casual comparison suggests that while she was well aware of class differences she was unwilling to dilute her feminist politics with any sustained class-based analysis. Cousins accommodated class inequalities in a very "naturally" gradualist approach while putting first the issue of a sexual battle uncomplicated by class issues.

In her attempt to represent the diversity of Indian women she was also careful for instance to include "the voice of the Muslim woman", in the October 1927 issue of Stri Dharma where she interviewed one Mrs Muzheruddin, using her to interlocate on the freedoms which Muslim women had won in Egypt, Turkey and several European countries. Cousins however had very restricted access to Muslim women and to her lower class "muslim sisters" whose sexual political positions were more complex perhaps than their Hindu sisters. Cousins saw the integration of Muslims and Hindus, the dissolution of all barriers of community, religion, caste and sex as an inevitable part of the vision of a new India.⁹

In an effort to familiarize westerners with "the Indian woman" in The Awakening of Asian Womanhood Cousins devoted individual chapters to "pen-portraits" of certain impressive

⁸Cousins to Hanna Sheehy Skeffington, 2 November 1916, Sheehy Skeffington Papers, MS 22,680.

⁹Cousins, Stri Dharma 10:12 (October 1927): 25.

Indian women whom she had personally encountered. One such figure was the internationally renowned poet Sarojini Naidu. Naidu was a celebrity figure whose influence Cousins appreciated for the women's cause. Cousins wrote of Naidu with a great sense of reverent infatuation, (which, on closer acquaintance ultimately disappeared to be replaced by an exasperation with Naidu's nationalist coquetry) and ultimately presented her as an unfortunately Anglophonic oriental source of Frenchness:

Her English is perfect, but I have always wished to hear her speak in one of the Indian mother-tongues. I imagine she would be entirely irresistible in them....In personality she ever kept reminding me of France. I felt I should be speaking French and not English to her. The silver ornaments on her dressing table of the French Empire design, the gestures she so often uses, slight mannerisms akin to pose, the foreign nuance in her accent, and her wit and vivacity, caused one to speculate romantically about her last incarnation and dream of her as the bright and shining star of some brilliant French salon at the height of France's glory. Or, rather, she is the Aryan type from which we can see how easily sprang the whole Celtic race. In appearance, save for her dress, she might easily be taken for an Italian, such is the similarity between the root-stock and its children of Europe.¹⁰

By 1927 Cousins's perspective on "Indian" racial genealogy had changed little:

¹⁰Cousins, Awakening of Asian Womanhood, 119.

To my mind the Kashmiri Brahmins are India's premier aristocracy, the first pioneers to India of the wonderful Aryan race, the Root-Stock from which so many sub-races have radiated forth, such as the Greek, the Celtic, the Teutonic, etc.¹¹

We have seen therefore how as Cousins familiarized herself with contradictions and varieties of female experience in India she quickly became aware of the impossibility of generalizing about the plight of "the Indian woman." Cousins ably scaled this potentially paralyzing epistemological hurdle however by simply emphasizing the diversities of class, caste, region, and community, and then promptly moving on to nationalize and internationalize the image of "the Indian woman" anyway all in the cause of furthering the political "advancement" of various Indian women. Cousins attempts resulted only in a more finely deconstructed version of the same original difference.

However, Cousins's strategic essentialism was underpinned by more than a savvy political expedience. It was also rooted in the Theosophical premise that all was indeed one underneath the superficial differences of culture, history and constructivism; and that in order for cultural diversity to be protected from a hegemonic globalization, which she saw principally working as vulgar westernization there should be a general recognition of the profound universal unity of

¹¹Cousins, "Kashmir Beauties," Stri Dharma 10:8 (June 1927):114.

womanhood the world over within which diverse womanhoods could flourish unchanged by history and thence evolve by sharing only their best with other cultures. To this end it was important that Cousins somehow construct and ventriloquoize a univocal category of Indian womanhood so that it could compete in stakes of enlightenment with various other national womanhoods whom she equally homogenized.

Cousins's theosophical framework for thinking national, international and sexual identity was subtended by a creative contradiction between national/racial difference and theoretical international/universalist homogeneity which was held together in the paradox "unity in diversity". But for Cousins all these contact lines and international adventurings gave her a sense of fusion with her own sex which never failed to stir her deeply. Having discovered for herself the power of that fusion or "great solvency" as she put it, in the Irish and English phase of militancy, she now also urged it also on Indians. In 1924 we see a note of disgruntled despair appear in Cousins's lament of an absence of an idealism which was not bound by stale religious categories or self-interest. Cousins advertised the healing benefits of investment in a noble ideal of social reform or patriotism, asking Indians to broaden their definition of religion.

"Causes save one" is a phrase that has a great deal of truth in it. The cause must be some kind of high ideal such as the enunciation of a principle, the freedom of a people, the devotion to something

afar, from the sphere of our sorrow. A cause can submerge a personality; it can unite contradictory personalities. It can obliterate personality. India has not yet learnt how to truly save any cause save that of religion. Her people must learn that there is a religion in patriotism, that there is a cause of religion in social reform which will demand the sacrifices even unto death. Women in the West, particularly in Great Britain and Ireland, found the cause of their sex, the removal of sex disqualification in politics, their great solvent. Now the women of America are experiencing the same fusing quality in their fight for the inclusion of an Equal Rights Amendment in the American Constitution and the remarks on this subject found in their weekly magazine Equal Rights are so true that every reader may apply it to present conditions in India and see the contrast that exists here to the detriment of all the causes for which, alas, people are still only half-heartedly serving, one half being the cause, the other half consciously or unconsciously being the self.¹²

From 1923 to 1925 Cousins wrote a weekly column for New India entitled "Women at Home and Abroad" in which she kept a running commentary on significant women's news around the world and pushed for the adoption of certain strategies in Indian campaigns. It is particularly striking however that she now came increasingly to identify motherhood, at least rhetorically, as the essential and universal bond of women:

It is well worth the trouble of perusing foreign journals or even having them translated to see how closely related the vital interests of women are the world over. Peace, the protection of children, education, the abolition of prostitution, the establishment of a single standard of morality, prohibition, maternity benefits, equal pay for

¹²Cousins, New India 7 June 1924.

equal work, equal marriage and divorce laws, equal guardianship laws, women on juries, women police, the suffrage, where women are still disenfranchised, all of these things and others occur over and over again in every language. They indicate that women everywhere are "sisters under the skin", and curiously enough they can all be led back to one central theme, motherhood....It is as if within their very fibre women had certain instincts that are not yet developed in men. And these instincts are at the moment of the greatest possible importance to humanity, for they represent the concerns of civilization and they repudiate brute force.¹³

Cousins's "sudden turn" to maternalism reflects the contours of the shifting of weight in Anglo-American internationalist feminism to more maternalistic, pacifistic lines, as well as reflecting perhaps Cousins's accommodation of, or temporary concession to, the amassing popular nationalist iconography of motherhood in India. The post war popularity of feminist pacifism lent credence to the notion that universal male instincts were just at that moment a little yet retarded in their civilization and development and therefore that women were the actual, although not the recognized, leaders of civilization in the present age. Cousins herself reflected on how the Great War "brought home to many the necessity of some organisation for the linking together of women for the purpose of preventing such a horror again ravaging civilization. It materialized in the Women's International League for Peace and

¹³Cousins, "Women at Home and Abroad," New India, 16 February 1916, 1924.

Freedom at the Hague, Holland in 1915."¹⁴ Significantly she also stresses that one of the reasons given for the establishment of the International Women's League for Peace and Freedom was because: "a woman's organisation calls out and gives scope for activity on the part of many women who would be in the background and quite inactive, in a joint organisation of men and women." 1915 however was also the year of Cousins's earlier theoretical turn toward motherhood as a national life-giving service as dangerous as war-front soldiery. It was not of course the first time that Cousins had, like most reformers, whether for reasons of genuine belief or of rhetorical/political expedience, located her sexual epistemology in established frameworks of religion to win a hearing for them on familiar grounds. Cousins was also only too well aware that to make any feminist agenda popular at the local level in Madras it would have to run along, and be presented along, conservative motherly-sounding lines. Furthermore it is clear that she saw it as expedient to muffle the notion of "rights" under the notion of service or duty so that women's emancipation should never appear threateningly as a selfish aim in its own right. In November of 1923 for example at a "Celebration Meeting of Madras Suffrage Victory" chaired by C.P. Ramaswami Aiyer, a Madrasi Brahman and early supporter of Besant's Home Rule League, Cousins urged that

¹⁴Cousins, "Women at Home and Abroad," New India, 10 November 1923.

"women should sit in the Council chamber within the next ten years": "all of them should work towards that goal, not from selfish feminine instincts but because they knew they were working not only for the good of women but for the good of men and children."¹⁵ In the Awakening of Asian Womanhood Cousins constructs the image of the (Indian) mother as impeccably virtuous as an alibi for Indian women's empowerment.

She may not be ready for it yet, but the path must not be in a state of blockade and of vested sex-prejudice when she reaches the point at which her spirit and influence overflows from the private life to the mothering of the national family.¹⁶

Cousins was not alone in trailing the metaphor of the home into the public sphere in order for women to colonize the public sphere from the space of the home, without violating the socio-sexual theoretical order.¹⁷ She had moved similarly in Ireland as she tip-toed between various national essentialist land mines with "woman's events" such as the

¹⁵Cousins, New India 8 November 1923.

¹⁶Cousins, Awakening of Asian Womanhood, 24.

¹⁷See Kamala Visweswaran, "The Modesty of the Modern: Women's Participation In the Public Sphere in Late Colonial India," Paper Presented to the SSRC Conference on "Creating a Public: The European Public Sphere and Its Alternatives Under Colonialism," Chicago Humanities Institute, October 1993.

"Daffodil Fetes" and her reassurances that the suffragist women were still in fact "womanly."

Cousins's role as international intermediary seems to have had the effect of reassuring both those Indian women, and men whose international/world image was being smeared in various ways, that she was working "for them" against the ignorant and "vested prejudices" of the outside world. Cousins's identification with, and speaking up for India's image abroad endeared her to many of her educated Indian feminist colleagues who had in the process of studying abroad, become Cousins noted more nationalistic: as she put it: "Europe is the graduate school for Indian Swaraj."¹⁸ It also meant however that in the same breath Cousins could deal out authority as she positioned herself as the validator, assessor and quality controller of Indian novices to enlightened liberalism. Cousins also seemed to offer her own newly won faith in Indian liberal politicians as proof that they could also convince other westerners of their enlightenment.

Addressing a meeting of the Bangalore Y.M.C.A on the

¹⁸"It is my experience that now-a-days all our women from India who go to the West return fired with a zeal to emancipate their country that was only mild before they left. They go away wearing western shoes -they go about only in sandals, Jaipur slippers or bare feet on their return: they pride themselves on their ability to speak English when they start out - they feel ashamed that they have lost their knowledge of their mother-tongue when they return and start practising it in public addresses! Europe is the PostGraduate Course for Indian Swaraj!" Cousins, Stri Dharma 10:8 (June 1927):28.

subject of "the Women's Movement in India Today" for instance in 1926 she prefaced her speech with a mention of how:

in Great Britain only women over thirty years of age have the vote...but in this great and ancient Oriental land women have been granted the political rights and responsibilities on exactly the same terms as men! in Japan women are prohibited by law from even attending a political meeting.¹⁹

Having glorified the recent suffrage "success" in India then she was free to pronounce that "No country in the world has the disgrace which belongs to India of having only two percent of its women literate in their own language."²⁰ She was thus then covered as she attempted to shame male audiences about their shortcomings as modern liberals hitting them where she presumed it would hurt most - in what she at least appears to have posited as their self-consciousness about their "statesmanliness".

The first problem is that of the child and education. India has got an unenviable world

¹⁹Cousins, "The Women's Movement in India Today," New India 28 August 1926.

²⁰Cousins even went so far as to point out that Americans were lagging woefully behind the spiritually advanced Irish whose constitutional acknowledgement that men and women have equal rights as citizens was an enactment of "the fundamental principle of justice and impartiality rooted in an idea of the potential divinity within each human form; "Women at Home and Abroad" New India, 22 December 1923; and "Women at Home and Abroad" New India, 16 February 1924.

reputation for the bad treatment of its women. What else can be expected when literacy among women is so low?...If there is little food in the house you do not keep all for the men and serve the women! You share and share alike, and that is why mental food should be shared equally by both. Your present method is not fairplay, not statesmanlike.²¹

Cousins was brilliant at collecting and comparing "hard" statistics on issues such as infant mortality with those of other countries but she used them to shower supporters with optimism as she marked every sign of improvement as unmistakable proof of a global progress which was unstoppable.²²

Cousins moved back to Adyar in April of 1921 to help Dorothy Jinarajadasa organize women candidates for the general election to the legislatures. Cousins declined the suggestion that she should be the first woman member to go forward for election to the Madras Legislative Council on the grounds that such a distinction belonged rightly to an Indian woman. Instead her lifelong friend Dr Muthulakshmi Reddy in 1926 became the first Indian woman to sit in an Indian legislature and was also elected Deputy President of the Legislative Council. Immediately Cousins began organizing election campaigns for various women candidates touring a number of

²¹Anon., "Mrs Cousins on 'Women's problems'," New India 25 September 1926 and Cousins, "The Women's Movement in India Today," New India 28 August 1926.

²²Cousins, "The Women's Movement in India Today," New India 28 August 1926.

cities and villages and focusing particularly on the five major Indian cities of Bangalore, Bombay, Calcutta, Madras and Patna. With only three months to canvass, one of Cousins's stalwart ex-students and feminist-nationalist protege, Kamaladevi Chattopadhyaya, was one of the contestants for the 1926 election along with Hanna Angelo. Cousins wrote their election manifesto stressing that as women they would be outside of party politics, and furthermore that "their return at the head of the polls will in itself publish to the World the honour in which India holds her womanhood, and be a refutation of the criticisms so softly levelled at India that she holds her women in contempt."²³ In the event Chattopadhyaya lost by a narrow margin of only 500 votes.

By 1929 Cousins was adept at presenting women for public office. Here in an assessment of Indian women's commitment to civic life intended to enlighten a British feminist audience Cousins shows her "savvy" outsider reading of Indian women's perspective:

Educated women are becoming most anxious to take up these public duties, for nothing appeals more to Indian women than the opportunity for service. And it is in that attitude that they regard all civic recognition, not as "Rights, but as opportunities"

²³Cousins, "Women Candidates for the Legislative Council," [For Favour of Publication, 17 October 1926] in Muthulakshmi Reddi, Margaret Cousins and her Work in India by One Who Knows (Madras: WIA, 1956).

to serve their Motherland.²⁴

Cousins also lobbied in 1923 in New India for a desegregation of the public sphere based on how the exclusion of woman's sphere unbalanced the sexual design of the state:

Woman's lives are spent in dealing with the processes of life - birth, the care of the child, the provision of daily nourishment, the nursing of the sick, the worship- of the life-giver. Men's lives are spent in the manufacture and disposal of things - sticks, stones, houses, land and money. The human equation will loom largest in women's view, the business in mans's. This is only natural, but it is the reason which makes it necessary that man and woman should act on decisions which have resulted from a consideration of both points of view.²⁵

By 1924 again in New India Cousins noticed the fast growing interest of women in the country towns of South India in public women's meetings: "Where three years ago it was difficult to persuade women to come out of their homes even to the number of fifty to attend a public meeting now over a hundred will willingly come and openly express their interest

²⁴Cousins, "A Memorandum on the Civil and Political Status of Women in India," Madras, 1929, Typescript in Eleanor Rathbone Collection, Fawcett Library.

²⁵Cousins, "Reform and Punishment," New India 23 January 1923, also published in the Times of India.

in public matters."²⁶ In 1922 the Madanapalle Branch of the WIA opened a Baby Welcome center. Cousins's governess-like report shows how she was trying to reform the shape and style of Indian motherhood in order to welcome her own ideological baby:

This widened the scope of experience in responsibility, organisation, punctuality and continuity; and the nearness of the activity of the new department to home life, in bathing, medicating, clothing and entertaining tiny boys and girls, mostly from the poorer streets, drew out the mothering instincts of the members in many delightful ways.²⁷

In Madras throughout the 1920s Cousins was involved in setting up and sustaining various "Women's Homes of Service" and the Avvai Home in Adyar. The function of the "Women's Home of Service" was to give vocational training to women as well as for child welfare service, and was the germ for the still thriving Madras Seva Sadan women's home. It was chiefly through the efforts of the WIA that compulsory education for girls in Madras on the same terms as boys was introduced; the Madras Children's Act was enforced; the Children's Aid Society brought into existence, and Indian women were induced to visit jails and hospitals. Besant had established earlier the

²⁶Cousins, New India 5 July 1924.

²⁷Cousins and Cousins, 300.

Children's Courts so that children could literally practice law. The juxtaposition of such child centered and criminal centered reform activism was no accident. Theosophists in general and Besant and Cousins in particular had a vested psychological and philosophical interest in proving that the child or the criminal, however culpable, was basically teachable and reformable, and who could, by exposure to the workings of "the natural law" help universal evolution to a speedy recovery.

In line with this kind of benevolent social service Cousins herself was appointed to the bench as an honorary magistrate for the Saidapet bar in Madras. This was the first time any woman had ever been invited to be a magistrate in India. Cousins agreed on the principle that it would open the magistracy to Indian women and on 18 February 1923 presented herself at the court house for the first time.²⁸ One month later she was asked to write of her experience for the Times

²⁸The occasion prompted James Cousins to write a poem in his wife's honor entitled "For the Installation of the First Woman Magistrate in India," which included the following lines:

She shall smooth put with healing hand
 The twisted purpose of offence.
 No sword her sentence will demand
 Where love awakens penitence.
 Keener than punitory blade
 Her eye shall touch transgression's core;
 And at that inner accolade
 Sin shall rise up and sin no more!

James H. Cousins, Forest Meditations and Other Poems
 (Adyar: Theosophical Publishing House, 1925).

of India in which she continued her reformist line from her days in Tullamore jail. However, most significantly, in India she viewed the "accused" as the result of a retardation in evolutionary systems:

On us women, the responsibility of our treatment of first offenders will lie heavily for we know that the accused are like little children; they are not so much our "fallen" brothers and sisters as our "rising" brethren, younger in evolution than ourselves, whose ignorance of civilized ways we have to supplement. Therefore the effects of a sentence on the life and character of the accused will be to us more important than an "eye for an eye" or a "tooth for a tooth"...I have been accustomed from childhood to the technique and atmosphere of litigation, as my Father and brother are in the legal profession, and it is intensely interesting and instructive to me to find human nature at law the same East and West.... I have not yet had enough experience to dogmatise, but it strikes me that there ought to be different penal codes and different methods of treatment to suit broadly different stages of evolving humanity. Penal laws like all methods of education have in the past been too cut-and-dried. The amount of pure legal knowledge needed by Honorary Magistrates is not great, and the use of common sense is used to produce the most equitable judgment.²⁹

It is useful here to remember that Cousins's feminist sexual politics were framed by Theosophical epistemologies of sexual difference and the evolutionist agenda for Indian genes and culture. In line with her earlier 1915 "Curse of Eve" ideology, Cousins saw motherhood as a necessary spiritual

²⁹Cousins, "Reform and Punishment," New India 23 January 1923, also published in the Times of India.

self-sacrifice to clone the perfect race, and she therefore urged that the quality and the purpose of motherhood be refined, not that motherhood itself should be jettisoned as a social institution.

Cousins was characteristically both clever and sincere in defending "feminism" against conservative backlash anxieties about feminist "mannishness" by articulating a definition of feminism which comprised "Indian" notions of spirituality, self-sacrifice and service ethics. She then held such idealism up against both Eastern and Western contemporary violations of such "ancient wisdom." Cousins was thereby charging conservative opponents of not being in fact as conservative as she was, and furthermore she was implying that her opponents were ignorant of their own history and therefore of their proper destiny:

The feminism of the soul, the spiritual feminism - that is the real feminism, the true feminism of the East and of Indian womanhood. True feminism is not the masculinism of women. It does not consist in women descending to the level of men, nor is it to become their duplicate. It is when women are not the equals of men that they can become their superiors; and it is also when they are free from men that they can be their true servants. To give oneself, one has first to possess one-self. Only free women can realise the great deal of self-sacrifice. For without the freedom of self, none can be really self-sacrificing. True servants of men - that is to be the true servants of the God in men for that is the only true relationship between the sexes; each one looking to the other as the symbol and expression of the one Divine Being in one of its dual aspects. That was the principle of the ancient wisdom: the reciprocal worship of the One in both, a worship of which the present

idolatry of women by men in the West, and that of men by women in the East are a debased disfiguration.³⁰

Cousins expressed her doubt about the motives of the politics of "respect" which marked sexual relations both East and West:

It is strange that in the West, where the lives of women are so free and open to view, there is a great conspiracy of silence about all sex matters. It is strange that in the East, where all the particulars relating to sex are known to all, even to the young children, custom in all its countries enshrouds woman in mystery, and seeks to secure respect for her by shutting her away from view.....The giving of respect to woman has come to be associated with customs and conventions of the social life rather than with the inherent character of the woman concerned.³¹

Yet she saw very well how charmingly seductive the idea of the "submissive Eastern woman" was, even if it was a by-product of patriarchy:

Nature has given compensation to her Eastern daughters by making them superlatively the custodians and exponents of gentleness. The Eastern woman's belief that her supreme happiness results only from utter service to her husband who she is taught to regard as a God, gives her a purity and a quiet sweetness not similarly found in other parts of the globe.³²

³⁰Cousins, New India 24 May 1924.

³¹Cousins, The Awakening of Asian Womanhood, 151.

³²Ibid., 158.

While Cousins appreciated the aesthetic delights of "feminine culture" she was aware of how such a "way of knowing" sexual culture could trap woman too narrowly in compulsory motherhood:

Whatever may have been the different status of eastern women in early historic times, it is the case that the East today identifies woman too narrowly with her function of child-bearing, and the atmosphere of awareness of sex is too tangible for psychological good health. However, it gives woman the appealing and alluring aspect of the charm of sex, and strengthens all of the distinctively feminine tastes of an aesthetic nature, such as love of colour, ornament, music and rhythm.³³

On the whole Cousins's universalist maternalism in India was much more lavishly displayed than it was in Ireland, but then every aspect of Cousins was much more lavishly displayed in her Indian period. Nevertheless there are multiple possible explanations for this apparent burgeoning of maternalist rhetoric in the specifically Indian context. Cousins possibly took a cue from Annie Besant's rhetoric in this regard whose feminist position in India radically differed if not outrightly contradicted her English phase, as demonstrated in the following expansive but ultimately essentialist definition of "woman" in Besant's speech on "Maternity and Child Welfare"

³³Ibid., 152.

which Cousins published in Stri Dharma and then excerpted for her own weekly article on women's affairs in Besant's New India:

We see her as queen, as amazon, warrior-leader of masculine armies, poet, novelist, singer, actor and in later days entering the learned profession side by side with men; we see her as lover, wife and friend, faithful unto death. But her supreme office, that which builds alike Nations and Homes, without whom humanity cannot exist, is woman as Mother. It remains for ever true, as Manu said, that "God created woman to be Mothers and to be Fathers, men." ³⁴

The subject of early child marriage reform was raging notoriously during Cousins's time in India and in those international circuits which carefully monitored Indian "progress." Cousins pronounced first on the subject in 1916 as one of the general and root causes of woman's oppression in India, using affordable tones of great certainty and massive generalization in a letter to Hanna Sheehy Skeffington:

The system of early child-marriages accounts for much wrong thought. A master here, about twenty four, has a wife of thirteen - he treats her from the first, of course as a child - and they never get away from the idea that women are children. ³⁵

³⁴Cousins cited Annie Besant on "Maternity and Child Welfare," New India 2 September 1923.

³⁵Cousins to Hanna Sheehy Skeffington, 21 Sept 1916, Sheehy Skeffington Papers, Ms 22,688.

Cousins's objection to early child marriage here, and one she generally sustained, was based on how it tended to stunt the educational opportunities of growing girls. Here in 1916 she renders to Hanna, for an Irish audience, the plight of the higher caste Indian girl:

In the higher castes the girl has probably been married between four and twelve but after twelve she must go to her husband who lives in his Father's house. There she is practically the prisoner of the Father and Mother-in-law and husband. It is not "the thing" for Brahmin or the better-class Indian women to leave their houses and courtyards. They are supposed to find the company of the large family party sufficient. When these poor young wives have spirit and a desire to continue their education they have an awful time before them, unless their young student husbands stand by them and even then the latter's education may also be imperilled.³⁶

As early as 1915 in the Adyar Bulletin Cousins wrote of translating the "maternal function" of the female into a metaphoric social maternalism which would refine the individual, both female and male, in addition to checking the growth of "the population": "the spiritualizing of the race will decrease the population as it purifies it of all its baser elements". Cousins felt that motherhood was a necessary burden imposed by the "Curse of Eve" as a sort of Karma that

³⁶Cousins to Hanna Sheehy Skeffington, 2 November 1916, Sheehy Skeffington Papers, Ms 22, 680.

women must endure in order to develop and become "a conscious co-creator with the Divine will (as physically incarnated within herself and husband) to allow the onward path of evolution". Cousins then, like many maternalists abroad as well as in India, saw motherhood therefore as a necessary device for "race reform" and used the conservative and nationalist iconography of the Mother in that reformist spirit as a temporary essentialist medium towards a future utopian moment of transcendental constructivism.

One of the essential conditions for further progress on our journey is the dethronement of the present idolatry of the function of motherhood. It is not to be concluded that motherhood is wrong at the present stage of the world's history. It is, in fact, most necessary so that forms may be ready for the gaining of experience by still imperfect souls. But motherhood is not in itself a virtue. Nay, rather it was given as a punishment, and is still used by a man as a means of holding woman in subjection. Imposed compulsorily as it is by man, motherhood has been elevated by him into the ideal for women, as an excuse for his own pleasure. But looked at in that way, it is only the curse of Eve in operation....

But the parallel growing power of the feminine qualities on the inner planes will show her that unless she fulfils the responsibility nature has imposed on her of building forms, she will have no further means of development. Realising this she will get to her task in a spirit of voluntary dutiful sacrifice; she will indeed become conscious co-creator with the Divine Will, and evolution will proceed at a much increased rate, improvement in the quality of the race being accompanied by its gradual decrease in quantity.³⁷

³⁷Cousins, "The Curse of Eve," The Adyar Bulletin: a Theosophical Journal for East and West 18 (April 1915):143-156.

Racial improvement is thus the goal. This was a stated reason for Cousins's feminism which she did not often describe in print. Theosophists believed in the slow evolution of races and were like many feminist organizations interested in eugenics. Cousins was thus advocating an abstract spiritual love-making with the Divine Will to help improve both "forms of humanity," men and women. However, she goes on to say: "Voluntary parentage undertaken as a sacrifice to the idea of brotherhood and the perfection of souls, and laid on the altar of the Planet-God of Life can be a spiritual act. In this sense only is motherhood holy and worthy of reverence". Cousins could only justify the institution of motherhood, and for that matter almost every institution, if it could promise a path towards a higher good and not merely exist for the purpose of human reproduction. Cousins's aim therefore was the reform of the institutions of motherhood and marriage toward this ideal, the ideal in which she had conceived her own marriage in Ireland.

Cousins lamented the degeneration of contemporary Indian ideals of marriage from the times of the Rig Veda seeing contemporary marital practices now as a "stumbling block to the attainment of spiritual vision." Although she believed that divorce was against all "occult and natural law" she also felt that "dignified and calm separation" under intolerable circumstances was by far the lesser evil. She cites as an authority the work of a Mysore scholar who wrote that the

Hindu religion holds up an ideal of marriage superior to all others, but Cousins is saddened to think that high caste India is further now from following them in many ways than any of the western civilizations. She also appealed to an Indian golden age in which the Indian woman purportedly enjoyed a "freedom of action, her fine physique, her liberal education, her influence over public matters." Cousins would appear to include her self amongst those who were:

experiencing the unchanging happiness of a union rooted in deep, self-discovered love, grounded in mutual mental respect, bound together by perfect mutual freedom of action, rising high above personal differences in the search for truth, branching out in many lines of individual, family and national service, bearing the blossoms of the beauty of life and the fruit of "generations of exalted deeds" and fine heredity.³⁸

It was precisely because of the immense power that the mother exerted over her children that Cousins felt that when Indian mothers would be as well educated as their fathers they "will have much more direct influence on public and private life than the western mother has."³⁹ In some sense Cousins used the notion of service as an alibi both for the participation of women in political life and for their indirect participation in public life through their (private) raising of the

³⁸Cousins, Awakening of Asian Womanhood, 48.

³⁹Ibid., 96.

politicians of the future as the path of least resistance. And yet there is also room for interpreting a genuine conviction on her part which was independent of popular Indian family values rhetoric, that the special, natural and universal relationship of mother and child was in itself a potentially powerful instrument of reform and if it could be released into the public arena as quickly as possible then so much the better. One book review by Cousins in 1916 gives an idea of both Cousins's educational philosophy and her need to believe in the essential individuality of the good and innocent properties of the child, perhaps as a sign of hope for the future.

The child is so studied as a "copy", as a "specimen", an object for analysis, rather than as a vital, lovable little human being, that one feels the author has somehow lost the most important aspect of his subject. Similarly he leaves out that quality of "individuality" which defies scientific classification, and he treats the child as the product only of the interplay of the forces of nature (heredity) and nurture (environment)...Dr Drummond, viewing and expressing child life from the purely masculine standpoint, has practically ignored the existence and importance of the Mother. It is a fatal defect. Mother culture is a necessity of child culture. A still more fundamental analysis of child life will show that the interests and good conditions of the Mother and the child cannot be divorced, and any book, system, or legislation, which fails to recognize this, is incomplete and requires further revision.⁴⁰

⁴⁰Cousins, Review of The Child, His Nature and Nurture, by W.B. Drummond, In Commonweal 28 April 1916.

This was almost exactly similar to the idea of M.K. Gandhi.

In 1924 commenting on the role of mothers in education Cousins responded sharply to one educational reformer, Mr Jayakar, who advocated that the function of women's education should be to cause women to accept the duties of domestic life, arguing that "the duties of domestic life" in fact demanded an interdisciplinary advanced education and which could still accommodate those "exceptional" women who preferred an intellectual or religious vocation over marriage. She was here again stretching the domestic home sphere over all the public world, literally reforming the master's house with the tools of the kitchen:

We ask, what is their definition of domestic life? It is usually thought of in far too limited a connection. Efficient domestic life needs a knowledge of science, medicine, nursing for the presentation of health; a knowledge of mathematics for its account keeping, its business prosperity, its solutions of life's problems, its ways and means, its preservation of the industries of India, a knowledge of literature, for its enrichment of thought, for the proper pride in one's national prose, poetry and drama, and a training in arts and crafts, for its beautifying of the home and its environment. It is only the very best education that can make girls good daughters, ideal wives and responsible mothers, and that will all leave opportunity for the exceptional woman who prefers to remain wedded to religion or art or science. It is reported that the above speaker said that if education did not fit woman for domestic life it had better not be given at all. With this one cannot agree, for any education is better than none. But if we aim at the fullest and best possible modern education and couple it with an ideal of service worked out practically in some

form during the whole student life, there will be no fear that it will fail in its domestic dharma, which will then be seen to include also national and international dharma.⁴¹

It was owing to Cousins's abhorrence of child marriage that she felt a general extension of education for girls was a necessary first step toward marriage reform in India. However she recognized that "daily in the transition time the pioneer souls will suffer.... and it is more and more borne in on me that some association or philanthropic body must raise some fund to support and educate such rebels when they are turned out of their homes, until they are trained to earn their living."⁴²

By 1926 having already established local homes in Madras for women who were caught in difficult economic and marital straits Cousins was therefore extremely receptive to the idea of instituting a new "oriental" style of woman's college and a national conference on women's education:

We need an educational institution to serve the needs of woman - the current colleges are fine but they have chosen to build on an intellectual rather than on a spiritual set of values....It always seem strange to the Irish-woman sympathetic with the East that Indian women know more about British and American women who live eight thousand miles away from them than they do of the Chinese and Japanese

⁴¹Cousins, "At Home and Abroad," New India 5 January 1924.

⁴²Cousins, Awakening of Asian Womanhood, 46.

women who are of their own continent and largely of their own religion.⁴³

Cousins's deep anti-secularism underpinned her notion of indigenous or "oriental" education and was aimed primarily to produce non-selfish workers for the cause of reform. An acceptance of selfishness as part of the human condition was something from which Cousins, like many anti-modernists, recoiled:

These meetings and the branches of the Women's Indian Association are acting as the adult school for Indian womanhood which in the last generation ended the education at twelve years old of even the few of its girls who went to school. Now, education is quickly spreading among the masses, but it is learning without social culture and is a menace to the future, for the accumulation of textbook facts without their application to life under the direction of a spirit of religious altruism results visibly in selfishness, self-satisfaction and superficiality of literacy. The next task for thinking women in India is the reform of Indian present-day education.⁴⁴

Was India ever educated? Were the masses of the people at any era literate? Or was knowledge jealously confined to limited castes and communities only, and then only to the men. At present legislators, householders, the vast bulk of Indian men and women do not desire education because they do not realise its value....Education is the doorway to everything for human beings. There is something wrong with the present education though, or it would be more popular and spread more

⁴³Cousins, New India, 2 August 1924.

⁴⁴Cousins, "There is a Tide in the Affairs of Women," The Adyar Bulletin 19/20 (April 1926): 66-67.

quickly. That is why the next two mass movements in the women's cause in India are the raising of the Age of Consent to 16, and the holding of an All-India Women's Education Conference to formulate the reforms that women consider necessary in the education of their girls and boys.⁴⁵

As Cousins put it herself "in the work for the emancipation of women the climax in these years was the creation of the All-India Women's Conference". The AIWC was inspired by the call of E. F. Oaten, the English Director of Public Instruction in Bengal who appealed at a prize-giving function of Bethune College, Calcutta in 1926 for Indian women to "tell us with one voice what they want, and keep on telling us till they get it."⁴⁶ An Englishman, who happened to be the father of one Mrs A.L. Hindekoper, a Theosophist from Karachi, relayed the appeal to his daughter who then discussed the issue with Cousins at the Theosophical annual convention in Madras in 1926. Cousins then asked Hindekoper to write some articles on the subject for Stri Dharma. And Cousins reported in We Two Together:

The organising and carrying out of the answer of the women of India fell to my lot. In the autumn of 1926 I sent out an appeal to women to form local Committees and organize constituent conferences in the Provinces and the States....It was an inspiring, if somewhat exacting, experience, to

⁴⁵Cousins, "The Women's Movement in India Today," New India 28 August 1926.

⁴⁶Cousins and Cousins, 447.

collate and condense the remarkable number of expressions right out of the hearts and minds of the women of India.⁴⁷

The scruple to collate and condense such a "remarkable number of expressions" in order to legitimize the Conference as a democratic parliament of all Indian women would prove such an arduous task that whenever the Conference was asked for "its opinion" the Executive Committee would often, owing to shortage of time, be forced to assume plenipotentiary powers, thus often causing both internal and external resentment and suspicion about its presumptuous hegemonic tendencies afterward.

The first of what would become an annual All-Indian conference was held at the Women's University in Poona, Maharashtra, in 1927, precisely because it was the institution in which Cousins had eleven years earlier first joyously encountered Indian women reformers. Hindekoper soberly reminded other AIWC organizers not to get carried away with their pioneering image and pointed out that the issue of educational reform had been long turned over by other reformers in India. Hindekoper urged that the Conference organizers take some time to collect diverse opinions from all over India rather than to generalize so quickly as to the educational needs of Indian women. Hindekoper was very

⁴⁷Cousins and Cousins, 447.

critical of some upper class Indian women who pressed for an Anglicized curriculum for their daughters. It is hardly surprising that Hindekoper, herself a Theosophist, felt that the curriculum should include preparation for an "Indian" cultural future.⁴⁸ It is further interesting that some Bengali

⁴⁸"In my work for the conference here I have found such a disdain for the non-English speaking ladies, such a narrow view of education, as if only what already existed was on the right lines and as if the Mothers of the pupils were inarticulate (and practically also without an idea in their heads), that I almost felt inclined to advise you to exclude English speaking women from the Conference!!! I am not surprised tat the Non-Westernised woman of India prefers the genuine article of an English woman to this kind of hybrid. (This please is not for publication; at any rate if you refer to it sa a necessary part of the work to be done, then omit any reference that might put the authorship of the remark to me, as such frankness would impede the good work; they are not ready to see themselves as others see them). About Miss Sorabji and the Bengal people, I see both their point of view and yours...I find here that some of the best people are inclined to generalise from what they have observed in their own Province or State. I have been in three Provinces and one State can see how absolutely opposite opinions can thus be truthfully based....the many problems to be discussed have ben in the minds of educationists in this country for many years and are not themselves new....This then against the "idealists"; but for them is as I said before, that if the conference goes in to details, it may find that its memorandum is not as useful as it might be in some parts of India. I would like to suggest hat the conference be engineered s the first of a series, and that no memorandum or only one of basic principles, be promulgated as the direct result of its meeting; but that the delegates dissolve themselves into committees, each with some definite aspect in view and that these committees work during the ensuing year and bring their reports and conclusions to a similar Conference to be held next year, i.e in January 1928. The matter is so vital that nothing should be lost by being in too great a hurry to produce a valuable memorandum, after all these years of sitting still as it were; and the matter is so urgent that no time should be lost in striking while the iron is hot, or we may lose the opportunity altogether.

Another most important aspect of the question is that I

women reformers were apathetic to Cousins's call partially because, as one correspondent put it to Cousins, of "a prejudice which seems to connect the conference with

find it almost impossible here to make them think of education nationally, i.e. of the education of the princess down to that of the sweeper's daughter, including on the way that of the most numerous class of all, the daughters of the 80% of the population, the raiyats and agriculturalists generally. Both consciously and unconsciously they think only of the professional classes to which they belong. One young lady yesterday wanted the sons of the agriculturalists all to take Matric: "otherwise they could not be considered educated".

Please lay stress on the fact that in these days they must think not of their family or caste only, but of Indian girls, and perhaps especially of the Indian girls of that 80% whose problems are much the same wherever they live, whose Fathers create the food we all need; whose Fathers are being starved into debt, disease and early death, who as a class are the foundation on which all the "upper classes" rest; that it is a tottering foundation and India may be on the verge of a French revolution, unless this senseless worship of Matriculation not only ceases for the boys, but is cut out at once for the girls. Please I am very strong on this point...

She includes an extract received from a non-English speaking Mahommedan "who are supposed to be inarticulate and without an idea on education" by my English speaking and educated Indian ladies, saying how she would like a sound general education. That will make them better wives and mothers, and will help the education of the future boys of India. I am also of opinion that English or French should form part of the curriculum of studies, which should also include needlework, hygiene and music. The Indian young ladies should be educated under experienced European lady teachers in boarding schools as far as practicable."

The "or French" is probably in this case due to the fact that her husband who is an English (ie. London not by race) barrister knows French and probably translates to her the stories, etc he reads and thus had given her a good idea of French literature. In other cases it may be due to a revulsion from English merely on account of its being the language of the bureaucracy.

Not bad the above for the inarticulate mother."

A.L. Hindekoper to Cousins, 11 October 1926, Indore, C.I.
AIWC Papers, Roll 11, File 32.

theosophy."⁴⁹

To some extent the AIWC shared common ground with the educational philosophy of Besant's Theosophical Educational Trust. While Cousins emphasized the equality of women's education as the *raison d'être* of the conference, it is interesting that the first resolution of the AIWC defined education as "training which will enable the child and the individual to develop his or her latent capacities to the fullest extent for the service of humanity. It must therefore include elements for physical, mental, emotional, civic training".⁵⁰ This resolution echoes the language of the third object of the Theosophical Society which refers to a commitment to develop the latent (occult) powers hidden within man. The AIWC and the Besantite educational vision both aimed to reinvent a modern Indian educational curriculum which mingled a respect for religious and moral tradition with a practical vocational training for the largely agricultural economy of Indian village life. The idea of reviving indigenous traditional cultures came to be pinned on

⁴⁹Anon. in Calcutta to Cousins, 2 December 1926: "I have been going about trying to rouse interest, but find a general apathy combined with a prejudice which seems to connect the conference with theosophy. I went to Mrs P. Chowdhery. The Federation of university Women I find have coolly said that it is impossible to send a delegate in such a short space of time and has appointed a committee to organise a conference in Bengal which is to meet after the Poona Conference." AIWC Papers Roll 14, File 2.

⁵⁰AIWC Annual Report, 1927.

educational reform for the eventual production of the authentic Indian child. This ideological position was repeatedly emphasized in the agenda of the AIWC, the principles of education laid down for Theosophical schools, and was most precisely expressed by Cousins's close cohort in activism and self-avowed disciple, Kamaladevi Chattopadhyaya:

One idea that the women's conference stressed very much was that the child is a potential power, and it was important that his potential should be developed, that it was not a blank slate on which the teacher wrote. So that the child should have opportunities for every type of creativity. A lot of stress was laid on music, dance and crafts, that these should be introduced in schools...⁵¹

This Rousseau-like educational philosophy had certain links to a wider romantic tribalist conservationism which informed Cousins's fetish to preserve the gentle purity of the Indian woman.

There is some sense in which both the renowned intuitive "untainted" purity of the woman, and particularly the Indian woman was seen as a channel for these latent hidden powers which by the same logic a child would "naturally" possess in the most pristine and passive form. The Theosophical focus on education and the Theosophical program for a national university and a World University as a more rounded

⁵¹Kamaladevi Chattopadhyaya, Oral Transcript, p.52,

alternative to mere rationalist and empirical knowledge was to some extent carried over to other non-Theosophical cultural and educational reformers especially around Madras who encouraged Panchayat schools on the model of old village school councils which educated the child "holistically" for "life."⁵²

The establishment of the AIWC as an educational reform conference initially can thus be read as a manifestation of the dovetailing of the enlightened liberal political ideology subscribed to by a stratum of Indian intellectuals who wanted to "uplift" India through educating both boys and girls, with the goal of the Theosophical Society to revive the ancient wisdom latent in indigenous traditional cultures, a goal itself latent within the romantic cultural politics of Rousseau and heirs of that dialectic of modernity which legitimized "the natural."

In fact even in 1924 Cousins envisaged educational reform as an organization to respiritualize and thus to reorientalize India:

These meetings and the branches of the Women's Indian Association are acting as the adult school for Indian womanhood which in the last generation ended the education at twelve years old of even the few of its girls who went to school. Now, education is quickly spreading among the masses, but it is

⁵²In Madras Besant even established a shortlived children's court as well as the Olcott Panchayat school in Adyar.

learning without social culture and is a menace to the future, for the accumulation of textbook facts without their application to life under the direction of a spirit of religious altruism results visibly in selfishness, self-satisfaction and superficiality of literacy. The next task for thinking women in India is the reform of Indian present-day education.⁵³

Other resolutions of the AIWC were that: moral training based on spiritual ideals should be made compulsory for all schools and colleges; that ideals of motherhood and beautiful homes should be kept uppermost; an appeal against early marriages before the age of sixteen; and that primary education be made compulsory for both boys and girls; that the vernacular should be the medium of instruction in secondary schools, English being a compulsory second subject. The fine arts took their place in alternative for girls not going on to college, and sex hygiene in schools and colleges was recommended. Special scholarships were called for women students in Law, Medicine, Social Science and Fine Arts. Adult education was also recommended.

That Besant was not associated officially in any way with the AIWC probably had more to do with her ageing years than with anything else. In the same year as the AIWC was founded however in 1927 Besant launched the "World Mother" movement around the spiritual potential of Rukmini Devi Arundale, wife of Theosophist George Arundale. Interestingly Rukmini Devi

⁵³Cousins, "There is a Tide in the Affairs of Women," The Adyar Bulletin 19/20 (April 1926): 66-67.

also did not become involved in the AIWC any more than she took any assertive role in the World Mother movement which she was appointed to lead.

While Cousins supported the idea of the World Mother movement her own ideas were more focused and grounded on more popular mother figures of the Indian national cause. Sarojini Naidu, who had also voiced Cousins's suffragist address earlier, developed a rather ambiguous relationship with the AIWC as Cousins recorded: "[Naidu] was then developing a complex against our threatened emphasis on women's affairs, and labelled herself a humanist rather than a feminist."⁵⁴ Naidu however was to remain a central figure both in the cultural political field and in the explicitly political field which Cousins traversed.

Cousins justified the rather elite constitution of the AIWC executive on the basis of those in power having more influence, commanding more respect, and also because she was trying to reform, in her own words, "the lowest to the [ideological standards of] the highest:"

We were a democratic body, but we want to represent all the people, from highest to lowest, and to lift the lowest towards the highest....I was no toady, but I recall a touch of pride when at one of these open sessions I counted eight royal ladies on the platform. We were out to liberate what Tagore called "the poorest, the lowliest and the lost" and I felt that a strong initial pull from above would

⁵⁴Cousins and Cousins, 450.

help the process.⁵⁵

Cousins received a rather cold response from Bengali women reformers on the question of their support for the AIWC. Certain Bengali circles would continue to constitute a long time site of tension in the conference. Cousins stressed to these women, whom she would privately dub "Bengali intransigents," that the AIWC did not intend to interlope on the already established educational reform movement in Bengal and that the AIWC conceived of itself as more of a consultative body rather than as an administrative one with lurking imperial designs to take over the entire question of women's educational reforms in the country.⁵⁶

Cousins foresaw potential problems in the AIWC's

⁵⁵Ibid., 459.

⁵⁶"The Bombay women's council had done special educational research work of the most valuable kind before either you or I began to agitate in this movement, and it has not asked for any special regulations concerning it. I shall be glad to have your suggestions regarding the method by which you would suggest that Bengal delegates for the Conference should be elected for February. We do not think of the Conference as much as an administrative body as of it as a consultative body. Please write me again, and we may be able to get at a modus operandi." Cousins to Miss Wright of Bengal, 25 Sept 1927. AIWC Papers Roll 14, File 2. And one year later: "I heard nothing about Mahadevi's moves. I do not think her a sound thinker or even worker. Give her enough ripe and she will hang herself. I don't think she has any following. It is another Bengal intransigent...May all come right for your ideals which are always true and sound." Cousins to Chattopadhyaya, 24 Sept 1928. AIWC Papers, Roll 15, File 10.

closeness to government influence, whereas by contrast she conceived of the WIA as more independent and therefore more free to express nationalistic sympathy. As Cousins once more encouraged Kamaladevi Chattopadhyaya, her ex-student and feminist and cultural nationalist protege to "throw herself into the work of the conference" she warned of how it would be Chattopadhyaya's challenge during her term as secretary of the AIWC to keep the AIWC free of government influence :

I know no other organisation in India which can undertake the propaganda for the all-round welfare of women. I do hope you will throw yourself entirely into it. The difficulty will be to keep the education conference from becoming interlinked with government servants and that kind of influence, and when it gets too strong then the WIA is the next line of defence for free propaganda of an all-Indian character.⁵⁷

Whatever of her diplomatic palliatives to the "Bengali intransigents" Cousins clearly conceived of the WIA and the

⁵⁷ "In a small matter here in Geneva concerning an attempt of mine to widen the local Theosophical network to meet the international importance of the city I am having just as bothersome problems and adjustments though of course they do not affect such vital interests as ours in India....I am greatly pleased at your feeling of desire to do organising work for the WIA I agree with every thought you have about it..I know no other organisation in India which can undertake the propaganda for the all-round welfare of women. I do hope you will throw yourself entirely into it. The difficulty will be to keep the education conference from becoming interlinked with government servants and that kind of influence, and when it gets too strong then the WIA is the next line of defence for free propaganda of an all-Indian character." Cousins to Chattopadhyaya, 4 September 1928, AIWC Papers, Roll 15, File 10.

AIWC as operating in concentric logic. She hoped that the AIWC would gather the grass roots and elite women into one enormous national referendum on a wide array of issues, while the WIA could rove more freely, obliquely pressing the AIWC toward particular stances as occasions arose.

Cousins remembered for instance talking the idea of the AIWC over with the Vicereine Lady Irwin, commenting later that "anything that smelt of politics at that time was suspect. I think she was relieved to find that it was non-political. It included women of every shade of religious belief and political opinion."⁵⁸ The whole contrived split between what dimensions of life were the concern of "politics," as opposed to the legitimate concern of women, was an artifice which Cousins and the AIWC theoretically bound themselves to, and largely sincerely believed to advantage, in not ruffling the feathers of such symbolically and actually politically important conservatives as Lady Irwin.

However, as the public political and private women's spheres began increasingly to blur their edges, and especially in the context of the national movement, the question of the AIWC's stand on "politics" and party politics in particular became more and more inflamed and even appeared by the mid thirties to threaten its very existence. Further, as the national question became increasingly complicated by the

⁵⁸Cousins and Cousins, 429.

Hindu/Muslim communal question the government adopted the position of a neutral secular peace keeper, a position which as has been widely noted, legitimized its continuing colonial rule. The Government invoked this same communal political quandary to justify its hesitancy on specific reforms called for by the AIWC such as the child marriage reform bills and the franchise reform in the 1930s. Both these issues of course involved class, caste and communal issues as well as broadly sexual politics. And it is on these two issues that an illustration can be made of how Cousins went about trying to secure her feminist vision as she negotiated the overlap of national, communal and class questions.

The AIWC strongly supported the Sarda Resolution - a bill put forward by Harbilas Sarda, for the raising of the age of consent to marry.⁵⁹ The AIWC urged that half of the committee of inquiry proposed by the Government to deal with the issue should be women. The AIWC justified the request on the basis that, as it put it: "we are not divided by Party or Communal cleavages as are the men." However AIWC stalwart Hansa Mehta would later remember how she moved a resolution on child marriage at that first AIWC Conference at Poona in 1927 and, as she wrote later; "what amazed me was the vehement opposition from the South. Even Mrs. Cousins was not in favour

⁵⁹For a detailed account see Geraldine Forbes, "Women and Modernity: the Issue of Child Marriage in India," Women's Studies International Quarterly 2(1979):407-419.

of passing the resolution at that stage."⁶⁰ About the same time in December 1927 Cousins revealed how she, as an outsider, hesitated to fix a specific age for the raising of the age of consent:

Like all Western women I personally feel so strongly the appalling wrongs that result to the Indian race and to its womanhood from the customary early marriage of the large percentage of Indians that I have not before formulated a fixed age for the marriage reform, fearing I might do injustice to Indian opinion. But since I organised the scheme for the AIWC on Educational Reform this time last year, the women all over the country of their own initiative called so spontaneously and so remarkably for the age of marriage to be raised to 16 for girls and 21 for boys that I had no further doubt as to my duty....Your present bill advertises to the world at this psychological moment when Miss Mayo has focussed the attention of the world on the sex life of India that you men think yourselves reformers when you fix the age of 12 as proper for girls. To make this age legal against the wishes of the organised, vocal, and progressive women will do more to retard Home Rule than you have at all realised. You will give the impression that Indian manhood approves of what other races on the world consider the sex standard of the degenerate...History shows us that when Ram Mohun Roy brought forward legislation to end the burning of widows, the voice of the opposition was the same as may now be heard against our desire to end the marriage of immature boys and girls. There were the same appeals to religion to buttress customs, the same fear of rousing a religious revolt used to paralyse reformatory action; the same attempt made to attain the end by education without legislation.⁶¹

⁶⁰Hansa Mehta, "Some Reminiscences of All - India Women's Conference," Golden Jubilee Souvenir of AIWC (New Delhi: AIWC, 1977).

⁶¹Cousins, Stri Dharma 10:13 (December 1927):29.

Cousins's initial reluctance to front this particular campaign must be seen in the context of the eruption in 1927 of "the Mayo Controversy" which she referred to above. A central focus of the worries around the construction of the image of modern India was the 1927 publication of American journalist Katherine Mayo's book, Mother India, a devastating attack on the degeneration and depravity of Hindu culture as an illustration of the unfitness of Indians for Home Rule.⁶² The book became a best seller particularly in North America and purported to survey the condition of women and motherhood in India. The book was met with angry indignation by Indians as an extremely prejudiced and distorted account which was motivated by a desire to prove that India was far too backward to merit self-government. Mrinalini Sinha has traced the direct imperial motives behind Mother India as well as illustrating how effective the controversy was in hardening the suspicions of many progressive Indian feminists about the motives of concerned western feminists' interventions in, and representations of, Indian sexual conditions. Sinha also shows how the dynamics of the controversy thrust many vocal Indian feminists into the hands of the Congress and national movement and signally influenced the whole debate over the "party politics" of the women's organizations and the question of

⁶²Katherine Mayo, Mother India (London: Jonathan Cape, 1927).

working for national freedom as a way to achieve women's reforms. Sinha shows how Indian women achieved voice and agency both nationally and internationally through the national movement. Therefore the Mayo controversy of 1927 was a crucial turning point in the deepening of the politicization of certain Indian women as Indian women. The Mayo controversy began a process of sorting of the political and philosophical positions and loyalties of the leading cadre of Indian feminists around and including Cousins. That process of sorting however was a long and complicated one, and like anywhere else it was full of shifts and turns, of individual stubbornness, loyalties to friends, ideals, and jealousies and concern over office and image. The task here is to assess Cousins's role and efficacy as a sort of behind the scenes consultant therapist in the WIA and AIWC through those turbulent years of the 1927 to the 1942 period.

Cousins was amongst a plethora of writers who protested against the distortions in Mother India: "it will create nothing but race resentment and a fortune for its cleverly stupid authoress."⁶³ Cousins pointed out to Mayo's image of

⁶³Cousins, "Notes and Comments" Stri Dharma 13:9 (July, 1930):390; and Cousins, Miss Mayo's Cruelty to Mother India: Reprinted From the Statement Issued By Americans in India Entitled "Is India A World Menace" a reply to Miss Mayo and a Warning to American readers of Her Book - Mother India." Pamphlet, Adyar Library, 1927; See also Cousins, "A Protest Against "Mother India" Stri Dharma 10:11 (September 1927): 162; and Mrinalini Sinha, "Reading Mother India, Empire, Nation and the Female Voice," Journal of Women's History 6:2 (Summer, 1994):6-44.

India as a disease ridden and sexually degenerate culture that while there was of course disease in India, there was also disease in England and elsewhere; that Mayo omitted to see the full context of life in India and isolated only certain points out of context so that they did not make sense. Cousins also stressed now that child marriage only affected the Brahmin five percent of the population and went on to explain how it was assembly tactics and disagreement over the punishment and the lack of support from the British which caused the failure of the raising of the age of consent to fourteen. She added tersely that just because a country has problems does not mean that it should be ruled by another country. Cousins then recommended corrective literature such as the works of Sister Nivedita, Besant, Radhakrishna and herself. Mayo, as Uma Chakravarty succinctly puts it, had put a dent in the notion of the global sisterhood. Cousins was strategically located to counter such an offensive, which she volubly did, from her various bases in India, Europe and the U.S., where she toured thirty-four American cities in 1929. In April 1928 the Cousinses traveled to Europe en route to the United States. Cousins spoke at over 150 meetings of women's associations in Switzerland, France, Belgium, Holland, London, Ireland, America, Winnipeg (Canada) Honolulu, Japan, China, and Singapore, all in an effort to illuminate for outsiders the actual positions of Indian women:

The specialized view point of Christian missionaries, the political and commercial vested interests of England, the exaggerations and untruths of "Mother India" have all combined to draw generalised pictures of India so false, so damaging to its reputation that I often found myself flaming in passionate revolt against the questions that were put to me.⁶⁴

Cousins also opened an International Theosophical Centre in Geneva near the League of Nations and attended the League of Nations assembly in her capacity as editor of Stri Dharma. Mrinalini Sinha also shows how Theosophists in particular were viewed with suspicion in North American conservative circles for promoting the ideas of Gandhi and Tagore. At the docks in New York Cousins had a typically wry observation to make of the U.S. media's prejudiced "anti-policy" towards India:

Also came four press men. They headed for Jim who had been rumoured to be somebody from India, and India was just then a popular subject of villification among American press men, who knew nothing about it. Jim turned them over to me while he dealt with the customs. I gave them all sorts of news about the advance of women in India. None of them produced a notebook or a pen or pencil. Not a sentence of a half column of first-hand news of the real India appeared: it did not suit the anti policy of that time.⁶⁵

With some tongue in cheek Cousins pointed out how Americans

⁶⁴Cousins, "World Sisterhood," Stri Dharma 13: 1/2 (December 1929):10-14.

⁶⁵Cousins and Cousins, 480.

needed to have the correct facts and statistics about Indian conditions in order to develop "the unity of the world" and not least because the U.S enjoyed a comparable political relationship with the Philippines as England did with India:

For instance we have England hand in hand with India, or perhaps that is not quite the expression we might use in regard to it. And we have America in a similar position in the Philippines, so that the West and the East are linked together.⁶⁶

In the course of her world survey Cousins developed special identities, and thus functions, for the various womanhoods of the three continents of Asia, (North) America, and Europe:

It is because the expression of womanhood in Europe is along the line of charm, attractiveness, diplomatic subtlety, home influence, and that of womanhood in America shows itself as independence, self-reliance, economic power, and that of the womanhood of Asia as service of the family, conservation and religion that these three continents may similarly thus be generalised as to their respective characteristics.⁶⁷

Crucially, however Cousins had no place for Africa, Central and South America, and Australia in this global racial

⁶⁶Cousins, "The Meeting of Occident and Orient," in Third Theosophical Congress ed. D. Jinarajadasa, (Theosophical Publishing House, 1929), 104-109.

⁶⁷Cousins, "World Sisterhood," Stri Dharma 13:1/2 (December 1929): 10-14.

triangle, perhaps however because she never visited these places. On returning to India in 1930 however Cousins contributed a theoretically sophisticated article to Stri Dharma entitled "The Ideal Woman" which was prompted by her recent exposure to so many varieties of "world womanhood," and in which she lucidly set forth her here apparently staunch constructivist philosophy of the subject:

Travel in many countries proves that the conventions which lay down certain things as ideal for a woman and other things for a man are not at all based on fundamentals, they are only the reactions of the area to its conditions of population, economics, customs, history, climate....For centuries as men have had the monopoly of expression in literature, in the power of the purse, in freedom of action, and they quietly and comfortably select certain virtues which are difficult for them to exhibit and call them necessary for women, such as patience, modesty, beauty, fragility cloaked as refinement. If ordinary women had similar temptations to enforce their ideas they probably would make similar mistakes. But woman throughout the world have to-day been awakened by the Time-Spirit, the Re-former....If the woman has to be patient with the child, they say that the man must be equally patient with the woman and the child. If strength and endurance and power are desirable for man they are in their opinion no less for woman.⁶⁸

In the same article she was still loyal to her "femaculine" theory as she paid homage to the wisdom of the ancient Rishis symbol of Ardhanarishwara, the half-Lady and half-Lord which here appears quite rigidly again in its ascription of

⁶⁸Cousins, "The Ideal Woman," Stri Dharma 13:9 (July 1930):400-401.

bisexuality to all humans. And yet her next major campaign was to preserve the Indian and Asian woman from "deasianization." Surveying Japan for example Cousins concluded that:

I felt that Indian women could influence Japanese progressive women more wisely and more in accordance with their oriental natures than the American women whom they are following almost by imitation at present. I felt the same in the case of the delightful Chinese women I met.⁶⁹

As early as 1926 Cousins was anxious about the deculturization of Asia, as was reported on one of her speeches:

There was room for regret that the women folk of the East were rapidly losing touch with the best things in their medieval history and civilization. She was not diffident of success however in inducing her Oriental sisters to cling to the best in the East, which had been considered as the repository of knowledge, especially spiritual. She was sorry the East was merely copying the West and not the best of the West.⁷⁰

Cousins had an ingenious way of making all events seem perfectly in harmony - from the All Asiatic Teachers' Conference (of which she convened the section on Women's education) at Benares in 1931, to the "pacific" mothering role

⁶⁹Cousins, "World Sisterhood," Stri Dharma 13:1/2 (December 1929):10-14.

⁷⁰Cousins, "Woman at Home and Abroad," New India, 25 February 1926.

of Asia in the world. In 1931 she cited a book by Paul Richard The Dawn Over Asia which:

shows how the peace-loving Orient was horror-struck by the whole-sale murder through scientific instrumentality of the Occidental races. World history from 1914 to 1918 threw Asia back to fundamentals of educating for Peace. For Peace there must be Unity. For unity there must be expansion from the single nation to the continent of similarly oriented nations, and only from the unit of those continents, each self-conscious, each bringing its distinctive gifts can there come the true unity of international humanity. At the center of humanity stands ever the Mother.⁷¹

In 1929 she felt that "Spiritual consciousness and the fundamental importance of the family are gifts which Asia can make to world culture".⁷²

Cousins also hoped that India would set an example to Western film and drama by;

the purity of its film titles and decline to be tempted to a race with names of American films which disgrace Indian bill-posting stations, such as "The War of the Sexes", "His Other Wife", etc....The gifts which the West wants from the East are beauty, peace, philosophy, poise, magic, but

⁷¹Cousins, "Education, A Unifier" Stri Dharma, 14:4 (February 1931): 136-137.

⁷²Cousins, "Presidential Address to Women's Conference on Educational and Social Reform, 16 November 1929," Stri Dharma 13:5 (December 1929): 1-2.

not sex, with which it is already satiated.⁷³

On a trip to Western Asia Cousins was disappointed to see women at a Girls' Club in Baghdad: "It was awful to see them in ultra-modern dress. I wore a sari, and rubbed it in about home industries and keeping the beauties of national dress."⁷⁴ Cousins also attended a sessional meeting of the Pan-Pacific Union in Honolulu in 1930 which had gathered to discuss problems of human organisation, James Cousins reported his wife's reactions:

Partner noticed the absence of idealism: there was nothing that led, no vision, no ascension, only efforts toward horizontal ameliorations in response to material necessity; all quite good but inadequate because they omitted the raising of the quality of human life on which the quality of its organisation depends. She longed for a touch of the reverence, the humanitarianism, the grace and beauty of Indian womanhood. Hence a thought: "Why not a Pan-Asian Conference of Women, in India?"⁷⁵

Cousins's conception of the future immaculate consummation of the two spheres into a fusion of both sexes was most spectacularly countenanced by her grandest and most cherished plan for the convention of All Asian Womanhood, at Lahore in

⁷³Cousins, "Notes and Comments," Stri Dharma 13:12 (December 1929):533.

⁷⁴Cousins, "Women of Western Asia," Stri Dharma, 16:4 (February 1933):188-189.

⁷⁵Cousins and Cousins, 502.

1931. Cousins was excited by the prospect of dissolving the colonial blindfolds which had hitherto prevented Asian women from recognizing that "Asia is One" and thickly cast the idea in terms of the preservation of the values of the joint family:⁷⁶

Cannot Bharatamata, Mother India, the foster mother of Asia's cultures, the caravanserai of Islam from the West, of the Aryan from the north, of the Buddhist returning from the East, cannot she call all her daughters to her shores so that in a joint family they may review their oriental qualities and defects?⁷⁷

The spiritual consciousness and the fundamental importance of the family are essentially characteristics of Asian countries as contrasted with other continents and they are gifts which Asia can make to world culture.⁷⁸

⁷⁶Cousins, "An All Asia Women's Conference," Stri Dharma 13:5 (December 1929): 1-2, and "All Asia Conference" Stri Dharma, 14:6 (November 1930): 256. One can detect slips of Cousins' self satisfaction that she had finally cloned such a species in a celebratory evaluation of Mrs. Rukmani Anna, Cousins reports that "her speedy work, dint of character and self sacrifice, she was a perfect combination of Hindu and modern ideals and could be taken as a model by all ordinary women living family life and contribute their mite for the upliftment of woman in particular and the nation in general", Cousins, "Branch Reports," Stri Dharma, 23:2 (May-June 1935): 296.

⁷⁷Cousins, "An All- Asian Women's Conference," Stri Dharma 13:1/2 (December 1929):8-9.

⁷⁸Cousins, "Madras Women's Conference," Stri Dharma 13:1-2 (Dec 1929):28.

However Cousins also covered her apparent maternalism with a plea for a broadening of the definition and the brief of the maternal instinct:

The Trinity of Mother, Father and Child is the actual Unit of Indian Life. The child is only "well born" where there is equality of freedom, health development, respect in the duality of dissimilar complementaries, the father and mother. And this is equally true of those men and women who whether actually parents or not, perform by their natures the functions of mental and spiritual parentage through remoulding the world nearer to the hearts' desire. There is no real division of the problems of the sexes. The status of men and women acts and reacts on both like the seeming divisions of our conference. They are one and we work as the Irish say "separately together" for the good of the whole. I believe that such proclamation of the awakened and capable powers of the women of India was a course of education for the adults of the West which had been omitted by their local educational authorities but one which will be fruitful in the international appreciations, which are indispensable to world peace and to the attainment of India's national aspirations.⁷⁹

The aims of the All Asia Women's Conference were as follows:

1. to promote consciousness of unity amongst the women of Asia as members of a common culture Oriental Culture; 2. To take stocks of the qualities of Oriental cultures so as to preserve them for world service (simplicity philosophy, art, the cult of the family, veneration for motherhood, spiritual consciousness); 3. To seek remedies for defects at present

⁷⁹Ibid., 28.

apparent in Oriental civilization (ill health, illiteracy, power, underpayment of labour, infantile mortality, marriage customs);4. To sift what is appropriate for Asia from Occidental influences (education, dress, freedom of movement, cinema, machinery);5. To strengthen one another by the exchange of data and experiences concerning women's conditions in the respective countries of Asia, economic, moral, political, spiritual status);6. To promote world peace.⁸⁰

Although Sarojini Naidu was willingly elected President, as she was in jail a different person presided over the session every day instead. The resolutions adopted at the Lahore conference asked women to preserve a high standard of spiritual consciousness uninfluenced by modern materialistic trends and expressed the opinion that in order to promote a spirit of religious tolerance, the lives and teachings of great religious leaders should be taught in schools.⁸¹ However despite Cousins's vision of a continuing annual conference and the express wishes of the delegates at Lahore the conference was never in fact held again. This owed much to the political events in India which directly after the conference gained full steam. When the subject was mooted again in the AIWC in 1935 and 1936 there was a scarcity of enthusiasm for it and a

⁸⁰Cousins, Indian Womanhood Today, 145.

⁸¹Cousins Centenary Celebrations Committee, A Dedicated Couple, (Madras:1978).

sense that another Asian country should hold it this time, which proved impossible.⁸² Cousins was disappointed that the idea fell flat and would later write to the newspapers reminding the world of the epochal conference which had largely gone unnoticed.

In your leader of the 25 the inst expressing sympathy with the Empress of Abyssinia's broadcast to the world asking help for her doomed country you fearlessly state that "when the freedom of a coloured people is at stake no white power will raise a little finger to help it." You say that a new League is wanted -- "a League of only Eastern people for their own self-defence."

Your readers will be glad to be reminded that the women of India were the first people to initiate such a League. In November 1929, a clarion call was sent out from the Women's Indian Association calling on representatives of Asia's womanhood to come together to weld the links of Asian and Eastern kinship anew, links that had been forged in long past centuries by religion as in the Buddhist

⁸² On 9 June 1936 Lakshmi Rajwade, secretary of the All Asian Women's Conference wrote to the members of its permanent committee: "I also feel that unless and until we have definite assurances from the various Asiatic countries about sending delegations it will serve no useful purpose by merely keeping up an association which exists more on paper than in reality. To organize a second session of the conference on truly representative lines will require at least a full year's preparation, if not more, and as such the earliest we can think of having it would be at the end of 1937, when it could be held immediately before or after the annual session of the All-India Women's Conference. [thinking about whether to link up with the Pan-Pacific Women's conference or merging with the Alliance of Oriental Women (Persia)."] Lakshmi Rajwade, Honorary Organising Secretary of the All Asian Women's Conference, to the Members of its Permanent Committee, 9 June 1936, AIWC Papers, Roll 12 File 12.

era, by common culture, by similar attitudes toward human problems, by an oriental civilization as contrasted with an occidental civilization....This was the first conference of its kind ever held in Asia's long history.⁸³

The apparent "failure" of the All Asian Women's Conference to perpetuate itself may have partially prompted Cousins to publish in 1935 her second book, The Music of Occident and Orient. In this survey of the history of music as cultural signifier in both hemispheres Cousins suggested that while world fusion was already in progress it might take some "aeons" before completion and could best be expedited by the exposure of India's spiritually fertile music to the spiritually arid West.⁸⁴ Cousins bemoaned how Asian women were not sufficiently assertive to transmit the best of their culture to the West but she hoped that such cultural influence would happen anyway passively and patiently through the medium of music.

⁸³Cousins to AIWC, AIWC Papers, Roll 17, File 12.

⁸⁴"To share with a world seeking an injection of spirituality," The Music of Occident and Orient (Madras: B.G. Paul, 1935), 52; "[Eastern spirituality] to act as a brake on the descent to ruin that seems to be the inescapable end of the purely masculine way of life." Cousins and Cousins, 605; Preening the Indian image with the musical proofs of its originality of spirituality, Cousins argued that European classical music was a mere "drop out of the Aryan ocean." Ibid., 55, This was a drop, however, for which she long craved throughout her time in India: "the longing for an orchestral concert would be the one thing which would drive [me] home." Cousins to Hanna Sheehy Skeffington, 6 June 1918, Ms 24, 102, and Cousins and Cousins, 585.

On the other hand, the love of propaganda is not a characteristic of India. No nation ever knew less or cared less for the art of self-advertisement. One regrets that when it has, through pressure, recently taken to the limelight, it is to display the grievances and its weaknesses, that it comes as a suppliant, and not rather as a proud possessor of the treasures of its own culture, offering to share them with a world seeking for fresh inspiration.⁸⁵

Throughout the early 1930s Cousins made pointedly stark references to the "depreciatory" or inferiority complex of Indian women. Cousins apparently saw one of the levels of her mission to India as the tutoring of Indian women in the raising of their national self esteem.⁸⁶ Cousins could also get away with critiquing Western sisters' somewhat cavalier insensitive approach to Indian womanhood that Indian women were generally too graceful to do openly or directly. Cousins felt that at this stage she had after all earned her stripes:

A false picture of the Indian woman may have been painted abroad, whereas the true and nobler side of their character, less startling to the eye of the passer by, may have been entirely or at least partially ignored. This is understandable because it has not been possible for the women of other countries to see in to the lives of Indian women or even catch a glimpse of their better side. For in spite of their progress these last few years, Indian women are still too modest to blow their own

⁸⁵Cousins, Music of Occident and Orient (Madras: B.G. Paul, 1935), 55.

⁸⁶Cousins, "Branch Notes" Stri Dharma 14:8 (June, 1931):346.

trumpets, only if women from abroad come to these shores, and then care to trouble to proceed slowly and correctly and often tediously, can they hope for this intimate glimpse of Indian woman. Then with warm friendship, they are invited and may enter into the homes of Indian women and in that way may discover their true worth by observing for themselves.⁸⁷

Cousins's dream of reorientalizing and reunifying Asian cultures thus provided an important backdrop to her more explicitly "political" constitutional campaigns regarding the representation of the Indian woman in government and thus in the eyes of the world, a subject considered in the next chapter. Here Cousins was most anxious that the Indian nation and Indian women especially should not approach foreign nations in a "suppliant" posture, but rather with their heads held high.

⁸⁷Cousins, International Council of Women and National Council of Women in India Calcutta Conference Souvenir, (Calcutta: NCWI, 1936).

CHAPTER 6

FRANCHISE AND THE INDIAN NATIONAL MOVEMENT

The question of an expanded Franchise recurred in 1928 and consumed much of the energy of the WIA and AIWC executives through to the granting of Indian independence in 1947. The issue came about as part of an Indo-British grappling with Self-government for India through the series of Round Table Conferences in London from 1931 to 1935 and coincided with a peak moment of the Civil Disobedience movement. It is my aim here to suggest how Cousins's feminist and sexual politics and her vision of the true India, combined with her status of respect as one of the grand dames of Indian women's movements to influence the decisions of both the WIA and the AIWC on the franchise issue. In order to do this one must situate Cousins's voice along side the voices of a changing line up of colleagues in the executives of the WIA and AIWC; the choreography of Congress voices; and the voices of various levels of government, which included a complex set of pressures from British feminists and liberals. The chapter also sets out Cousins's feminist experience of the Indian freedom movement and shows how the self-consciousness of the nationalist campaigns affected and styled Cousins's philosophy

and her relationship to Indianness.

The first preliminary survey toward electoral and social reform was the establishment in 1927 of the commission for the review of Indian conditions under John Simon. The Simon Commission was boycotted by the Congress because no Indians were included on the committee much less Indian women, and the WIA quickly followed the Congress suit in the boycott. Cousins, Jinarajadasa and Reddy signed a protest on behalf of the WIA against the commission.¹ The Simon Commission established a secondary committee for the review of educational conditions under Sir Philip Hartog. When Reddy was asked to join the Hartog Committee she diverged from the WIA party line by accepting a role therein, feeling that more could be gained from co-operating with educational reforms than from an outright boycott. Reddy felt that "women at this stage of their development ought never to assume an anti-government attitude."² Reddy even offered to resign as vice-President of the WIA if necessary. The secretary, Malati Patwardhan, hurriedly assured her that no such action was necessary as she could in her individual capacity join any committee she wished without compromising her office in the

¹WIA, "Women's Protest Against the Statutory Commission," Reddy papers, File 8, NMML.

²Reddy to Patwardhan, 8 June 1928, Reddy Papers, File 11.

WIA, as stated in WIA rules.³ Cousins had just left India in April 1928 for her U.S tour. Reddy also wrote of how the initial WIA decision to boycott the Simon Commission was masterminded too quickly and hurriedly ushered past WIA members without giving sufficient time for debate. Reddy's second thoughts in Cousins's absence suggests her discomfort with either Cousins's and/or Jinarajadasa's way of ushering through such affairs, and furthermore it raises the question of the extent to which Cousins lent her "guidance" to the WIA's policy of taking such a firm pro-Congress stance so early on. From 1928 the WIA was increasingly having to justify its record to Madras critics as always having stood for self-government although claiming that it always chose to work for that aim through the election of women to Indian legislatures in a spirit of constitutional co-operation. The issue of the various women's organizations stances on the national political issue was thus first broached, in Cousins's circle here, by Reddy. When the Simon Commission finally published its report in 1931, Cousins now back in India, and writing more strenuously than ever in Stri Dharma, minced no words on her sense that the report was "special pleading in which through a quite human British bias every fact gets its angle twisted to reflect the desire of the Superior Seven [members

³Patwardhan to Reddy, 15 June 1928, Pathfinder (New Delhi: AIWC, 1978).

of the Simon Commission] to retain British domination."⁴ Cousins was amused to find that the WIA got a high place of recognition in the report for its "history-making activity!" and sarcastically intoned that the "WIA will be embalmed along with the report." She objected to the report's "patronizing pat" of Reddy as Deputy President of the Madras Legislative Council while ignoring the hundreds of other women serving in government at various levels. What Cousins objected to most actively was the government's attempt to redress the low proportion of women voters by giving votes to women whose husbands possessed the property qualification. Cousins said "we women see a much wiser and juster way - improve the inheritance laws for women. Then in their own right they can be citizens not appendages to husbands." Cousins saw the proposal as a dangerous regressive turn from the progressive natural beauty of the suffragist "time-spirit" which she felt had thus far befallen the Earth: "Marriage to a propertied husband is not a worthy new qualification for women voters in any land" and she cited "that veteran student of Indian life and history," Annie Besant's opinion that the British property qualification for representation was "utterly foreign to Indian conditions."⁵ She was further incensed by the report's conclusion that "the women of India have not shown themselves

⁴Cousins, Stri Dharma 13:9 (July, 1930):389-390.

⁵Cousins, "The Simon Commission and women," Stri Dharma 13:2 (Dec 1929):489-490.

good enough citizens to merit self-government," an assessment which must have rung in her ears as an echo of an earlier British government's similar assessment of Irish women's lack of interest in the vote in 1911.⁶ In Ireland in 1911 Cousins and her colleagues proved exactly how earnest was their desire for the vote by the adoption of militancy. In India, both the symbols of, and the moral justification for militancy would be very different, although at one level the spirit, the principle and the strategy were little different. In the July 1930 issue of Stri Dharma Cousins emphasized that the WIA had:

Continuously supported the claim of India to the right of self-government, and pressed in many ways for the grant of Swaraj. The best interests of women are directly involved in the speedy transfer of Indian government into Indian hands. Money at present devoted to an extremely costly administration will be released for health and educational needs which will bring inestimable blessings to Indian women. Therefore even as far back as 1918, the WIA members took part in the Home Rule agitation and participated in processions connected with the internment of Mrs. Besant.⁷

Cousins reported that when the Viceroy announced the Round Table Conference in November of 1929 the WIA had asked to be represented and submitted the names of three women - Sarojini Naidu, Reddy and Mrs. Brijlal Nehru - but that the WIA had

⁶Cousins, "The Political Crisis" Stri Dharma 13:9 (July 1930):390.

⁷Cousins, "The Political Crisis" Stri Dharma 13:9 (July 1930):390.

then quickly changed its mind and followed the Congress decision to boycott participation in the Round Table Conference proceedings when no sign "was forthcoming" that the WIA would be included. The real point of soreness for Cousins was that the WIA was being ignored and dismissed as "the" invalid or inauthentic voice of Indian women, after all the hard work she had done to institute both it and the AIWC alike on nationally organized meticulously democratic lines, at least on paper.

The question of whether Cousins was here "representing" the distilled opinion of the WIA, or whether she was setting the party line herself is almost impossible to decipher. Clearly Cousins felt she could speak freely for the WIA. Because the executive of the WIA was a very closely knit group of women living in very close proximity to each other around Madras, as opposed to the nationally spread AIWC, we have fewer records of the intimate conversations and quick decisions hammered out between such as Reddy, Cousins, Patwardhan and so on, save the emissions in Stri Dharma, the notes amongst Reddy's papers, and some scant correspondence between the AIWC and the WIA. Reddy however was to some extent "her own woman" and did not always follow Cousins's line of action, as she had made clear with her acceptance of a role on the Hartog committee, a position which Cousins had nothing to say about in her response to the Simon Commission report save to comment on its "patronizing pat" of Reddy, as mentioned

above. Reddy later expressed the reflection that women in general, (although she must have been thinking of such as Cousins) often enjoyed the celebrity and popularity of their involvement in the Civil Disobedience movement at the expense of working on the slow grind of grass roots reforms which consumed herself such as the campaign to abolish temple prostitutes (Devadasis). Reddy however resigned her seat from the Madras Legislative Council in 1931 in protest against the imprisonment of Gandhi for his salt marches. Although Reddy did not endorse Civil Disobedience herself she felt at this point that she was compelled on moral and patriotic grounds to throw in her lot with the nationalists, believing that only through self-government could social reform be enacted.

Although Cousins herself became increasingly committed to Gandhi's national movement, she arrived at this position in the wake of her disappointment with the inadequacies of the Sarda (Child Marriage Restraint Act) which could only punish offenders after the fact rather than restrain "people from marrying off children." Cousins characterized this as "shutting the stable after the steed has gone" and warned social reformers to be especially vigilant against allowing social reform measures to become "political currency for party bargaining," in which "they get submerged or postponed in the stress of some larger issue which logically should include

them at every stage."⁸ Cousins wrote that "we women have been fooled, given a shadow and not substance." As for the question of Cousins's "hegemonic" role then in steering the policy of the WIA toward a nationalist line, it would seem that Cousins simply trusted herself and her political instincts and "trusted" that fellow members of the WIA would follow her self-evidently correct suit. However, one voice of dissent which would become a decisive one was that of Mrs K. Radhabai Subbaroyan, wife of a zamindar landlord and well connected amongst Madrasi conservative and government-influenced circles. Subbaroyan had in 1929 publicly described the WIA as "the Adyar feminine politicians," meaning most likely Cousins, Reddy and Jinarajadasa, and also subtly implying that they were suburban, upper class almost-foreigners interfering from their Theosophical ivory tower. Subbaroyan implied that "the Adyar feminine politicians," bullied meetings to push their progressive line and steamrolled over conservative opinions, such as hers, in the hurried reaching of resolutions on controversial issues such as divorce.⁹ Subbaroyan's role in

⁸Cousins, Stri Dharma 13:12 (December 1929):528-529. Although this passage is unsigned by Cousins I am presuming from the characteristic tone and language that Cousins was the author rather than Reddy. Cousins however was most likely representing both their viewpoints.

⁹Cousins, Indian Womanhood Today, 160. Conservative opinion to the ginger progressive stance of the WIA came most forcefully in Madras from Government officials' wives, and then more often Indian than British. After a stormy newspaper controversy in the Madras Mail in 1929 in which Muthulakshmi Reddy and the WIA leadership were accused of gerrymandering and bullying the votes of a WIA meeting to

the Franchise issue of the 1930s, and particularly her concomitant representation of Cousins's "faction" to some British feminists such as Eleanor Rathbone, sheds interesting light on Cousins's position in a changing Indian national-feminist context. This correspondence, elaborated below at some length, reveals much about what various Indian feminists thought of Cousins and her interventions on their behalf, at different junctures. My purpose in detailing the Subbaroyan-Rathbone alliance so closely is to demonstrate how specific geo-biographical circumstances on the part of both British feminists and Indian feminists could interlock to pose a serious threat, and to some extent actually to thwart, the constitutional agenda of Cousins and her particular circle.

Reddy felt that Subbaroyan was jealous of Reddy's political honors in the Legislature. And indeed time may well have proven Reddy right if one judges by the fact that Subbaroyan herself was later elected to the Central

approve of a resolution for the introduction of legislation for divorce, Reddy commented privately that she felt that Subbaroyan was jealous of Reddy's appointment in 1921 as the first woman legislator in Madras Presidency and indeed in all India. Reddy Papers, File 17. Indeed Subbaroyan would go on to be selected by the Government to the Franchise commission in England, in 1933, a step Cousins viewed as a complete disaster. Cousins would later in 1942 write of Subbaroyan that "she always means well, but she often means something different from what the majority of her organised sisters want." By then however Subbaroyan had made something of an about-face and had become the first woman member of the Congress Central Assembly, was "courting imprisonment in protest against England's treatment of India," and had as Cousins put it appreciatively "burnt her government boats behind her for the future." Cousins, Indian Womanhood Today, 149.

Legislative Assembly, ironically for Congress. Whatever Subbaroyan's motives were, she became a useful agent for one similarly ambitious British M.P. in Eleanor Rathbone, whose sensitivity to boundary issues were, to put it mildly, not as well developed as those of Cousins. As Subbaroyan connected with Eleanor Rathbone, who was also secretary of the National Union of Societies for Equal Citizenship (hereafter NUSEC) in Britain, it was hardly therefore any accident that it was Subbaroyan who was chosen along with a Muslim woman, Begum Shah Nawaz, to represent Indian women when the Round Table Conference met for the first time in November 1930 in London. Although the AIWC provided a list of representative candidates to the government, their suggestions were completely overlooked. Begum Shah Nawaz was significantly not of the inner sanctum of the AIWC executive and was chosen to represent the Muslim minority, whose issues of purdah (seclusion) could always be relied upon by anti-suffragists as convenient obstacles to "all Indian women's" abilities to vote.¹⁰

Subbaroyan became a formidable opponent of that coalition of women in the AIWC led by Cousins, Rajkumari Amrit Kaur, and

¹⁰In Bombay the Rashtriya Stree Sabha and Desh Sevika Sangh held demonstrations against the participation of Begum Shah Nawaz and Subbaroyan; see Radha Kumar, The History of Doing: An Illustrated Account of Movements for Women's Rights and Feminism in India, 1800-1990 (London: Verso, 1993), 81, and Gail Pearson, "Reserved Seats - Women and the Vote in Bombay," Indian Economic and Social History Review 20:1, 53-54.

Rani Lakshmi Rajwade, chair of the AIWC Franchise Sub-Committee. The latter had also taken part in the first suffrage deputation in 1919. From 1931 to 1935 this same trio commandeered a barrage of protest against the proposals of the government to enfranchise wives of qualified property owners because they interpreted such a basis of enfranchisement as demeaning to the enfranchisement of Indian women in their own right as individuals. They extended their opposition to the general idea of reservation of seats for women in the legislatures and especially to the idea of communal reservation in 1933. They wanted votes for women to be set from the very beginning along exactly the same terms as given, or would be given to men. This "from the start" policy, and more especially the slogan "fair field and no favour" was the hallmark signature of Cousins's suffragist line from as early as her days in the IWFL, and she continued to use it in all kinds of ideological contexts as a sort of short hand for her opposition to the kinds of paternalistic favors to women which she viewed as entirely insidious.¹¹ The term "a fair field and no favour" was adopted by the AIWC and the WIA anti-reservationist lobby, represented specifically by Cousins, Rajwade and Kaur, and was also often cited as a convenient point of ridicule by moderate and conservative critics of this trio's position. Rajwade and Kaur became the articulators of

¹¹Cousins, "On Some Women Leaders Today," Stri Dharma (December 1933): 67-70.

Cousins's position of no compromise on the franchise issue for a variety of political reasons. A tracing of the genealogy of this slogan as Cousins's "special directive" is almost impossible given the style in which these women banded together and articulated this position in variously reproduced memorandae, letters to the press and resolutions which were always co-signed, so that the attribution of "a policy" to any one individual, is impossible and defies what Cousins would have called "individualistic" biography. Indeed Cousins, Kaur and Rajwade of course deliberately presented this "hard line" position as the product of a combined and scrupulously democratically reached consensus of all of the members and not just of the AIWC, but also of the combined three women's national organizations. The third such organization had been formed in 1925 as the National Council of Women in India (NCWI) in Bombay by a rather elite and educated circle of Bombay women, and it became in the perspective of the AIWC and WIA yet another group which the AIWC executive especially felt obliged to make overtures to in order to ensure a unified front of Indian women's position on the franchise issue. Further, Cousins of course had no desire to "copyright" the idea and appears to have left it to her younger comrades to express, having herself strongly set out the terms of the policy, except to prod them periodically when they seemed to be slipping into a position of compromise, such as for example just prior to the Government of India Act of 1935. Besides

Cousins herself the other members of the AIWC leadership were anyway far from short in taking their own ideological initiative. Yet Cousins's influence was key as one of the brains behind the "fair field and no favour" policy.

It is useful to compare Cousins's line on the franchise issue with that of another non-Indian feminist such as Eleanor Rathbone. The Franchise committee was established by the government in 1931 under Lord Lothian with a view to reporting to the Round Table Conference. Rathbone was not on the official Franchise Committee but travelled to India in January 1932 for her first visit in fact on the same ship as the Lothian committee members and conducted her own interviews of Indian women in parallel.¹² Anxious to win some reforms rather than none, Rathbone argued for accepting the government's proposed reservation of legislative seats for women as a pro tem step in the right direction. Rathbone had earlier angered Indian women when she published a pamphlet in 1928 entitled "Has Katherine Mayo slaughtered India?" which agreed with the main thrust of Mayo's book. She was criticized sharply by some Indian women at a subsequent conference which she organized in London called "Women in India" under the auspices of the NUSEC. An account of the stormy conference was reprinted from

¹²Barbara N. Ramusack, "Catalysts or Helpers? British Feminists, Indian Women's Rights, and Indian Independence," In The Extended Family: Women and Political Participation in India and Pakistan ed. Gail Minault (Delhi: Chanakya, 1981), 121.

the Manchester Guardian in Stri Dharma in December 1929.¹³ At that conference Rathbone was forced to give the floor to one of the few Indian women present, Mrs Deva Rao, only after the intervention of Mrs Pankhurst and Mrs Emmeline Pethick Lawrence.¹⁴ Rathbone's distrust of the AIWC and WIA thus echoed Constance Villiers Stuart's earlier 1919 suspicions about "extreme theophists" who were out of touch with the real conservative opinions of the majority of Indian women.

From April 1931 to September 1932 Subbaroyan conducted a thick correspondence with Rathbone which she typed with unusual care and marked "confidential" in which Subbaroyan was anxious to give Rathbone her inside story on the machinations, weaknesses and susceptibilities of Cousins and Reddy to Congress influence and "party politics." Subbaroyan "feared" that Reddy, although "genuinely keen on the women's question," was "liable to be easily influenced by others which makes her appear to be inconsistent at times." And Subbaroyan continued: "Mrs Cousins too has shown herself to be inconsistent and illogical. "This" [inconsistency on the part of Cousins and

¹³Cousins, "Notes and Comments," Stri Dharma 13: 1/2 (December 1929):1-5.

¹⁴Rathbone went on to write a book entitled Child Marriage: The Indian Minotaur (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1934), which was most favorably reviewed by Reddy who wrote that "her Indian sisters cannot be too grateful to Miss Rathbone for all the trouble, that she has taken on their behalf."Dr. (Mrs.) Muthulakshmi Reddi, Review of "Child Marriage" by Eleanor Rathbone, Stri Dharma 17:8 (June 1934):376-377. Reddy would also later refer to "narrowminded Europeans who can't see that women's problems are the same the world over." Reddy Papers, File 18.

co.] Subbaroyan deemed "unfortunate as the public who are already averse to the idea of women in public life point out that women cannot think clearly and cannot hold independent views and that they have not a practical mind. Besides, both these ladies and the Women's Indian Association are now devoting more time to party politics than to the women's movement." Subbaroyan concluded that the WIA had lost much influence because "any organisation which takes an active part in Party Politics does not receive the full support of all sections of people." More interestingly however Subbaroyan confided to Rathbone of how these ladies "are not well disposed towards me." She continued that the WIA was started and was still run by Mrs. Cousins and other prominent ladies of the Theosophical Society: "The views and attitudes of these ladies on any matter, change according to those of the leaders of the Theosophical society and as they run the association they influence it to change its views accordingly. Anybody who has the temerity to differ from them is not tolerated." Subbaroyan told how she had been obliged to differ from them on "some occasions as regards certain social and political matters and they have not forgiven me for it" and are "always hostile....I know several other ladies too find that this intolerance makes their position very difficult on the association. Dr Reddi herself mentioned to me some time back that she felt this difficulty and I think this really accounts

for her inconsistency on several occasions."¹⁵ In May of 1931 Subbaroyan informed Rathbone how after the Bombay meeting of April 1931 the three women's organizations came together and resolved for "equality and no privileges" and a "fair field and no favour" and decided that Sarojini Naidu should represent Indian women at the Round Table Conference. Subbaroyan's point was that several women there had been swayed by Naidu's influence although they later changed to supporting Subbaroyan's proposal and were now for reservations, and that the WIA in Madras had changed its mind from an original decision to ask for a 20% reservation of seats to supporting Naidu's proposal of absolutely no reservations.

Subbaroyan was "surprised to find that Mrs. Cousins too has changed her mind and that she now strongly supports Mrs. Naidu's proposal" and Subbaroyan continued that although Reddy held firm to the 20% idea, Subbaroyan worried: "I cannot say how long she will continue to do so. She agrees (at least just now) with me that we should not allow ourselves to be influenced by mere sentiment but think of practical schemes to overcome real difficulties:"

The political fervour in the country is such that many people do not think for themselves ...and are easily excited and influenced by Congress leaders, men and women. Mrs Naidu's word for instance, is

¹⁵Subbaroyan to Rathbone, 30 July 1931, Rathbone Collection, Fawcett Library.

law to a great number of our women. Even those who do not really agree with her do not dare to say so openly, particularly if any sentiment about national prestige is brought in.¹⁶

Indeed Cousins was increasingly writing nationalist propaganda in Stri Dharma, an activity which however she saw as different from doing "party politics." In May 1930 Cousins took the bull by the horns with an article boldly headed "Women and National Freedom". The article was a response to Gandhi's historic salt march in February of that year. Cousins assured her readers that Gandhi's premise of the right of every nation to self-determination by non-violent means - "that is the readiness to accept the legal penalties resultant by breaking laws which are bad" (a distinctly Besantite Theosophical principle and one by which Cousins had earlier legitimized her Irish militance) were "two such principles which appeal immediately to awakened women." And she continued significantly: "add to them the presence of a man of proved holiness and it is not to be wondered at that the women of Bombay Presidency in particular have gathered around Gandhiji's standard." Cousins listed the various women who had taken an active part in the Salt march and concluded that "all who have worked with these women, who have followed their careers (one of them was her own protege Kamaladevi Chattopadhyaya) will know that their motives, their actions, will be unimpeachable." Cousins then

¹⁶Radha Subbaroyan to Rathbone, 20 February 1932, Rathbone Collection.

went on to outline the positions of various women of "every shade of political opinion who may have differences with the present policy itself." The first was Besant who decried the unconstitutional methods and who saw "a new aspect of 'slave mentality' in people following Gandhi blindly as 'Dictator.'" Cousins mentioned that Besant was working to secure India's place in "a joint family" of East and West in a commonwealth of nations which would include Australia, South Africa, India, Britain, Ireland and Canada. Then Cousins amassed the "thousands of women who are government servants, the cream of the educated women of India," who "cannot drop their work and leave a condition of destructive chaos. They are also doing nation-building." Continuing, she mentioned the "constructive step by step work of unifying all classes and schools of thought in movements" being done by bodies such as the AIWC, the Seva Sadan, the Saroj Nalini Dutt Mahila Samiti, and the WIA, as equally important "freedom-builders" whose "work must go on with added zest." Cousins finished with an appeal for unity by trying to bind all the positions into the "One Work, the freeing of Mother India:"

As long as we all face the same way, as long as we all keep mutual respect and love...every act of every day can be a part of the eternal Satyagraha, and so long as we women and men will stand behind one another in a deep phalanx in which those at the back are as much a necessary part of the Great Push

as those at the front.¹⁷

It is clear from this article that while Cousins strongly supported the Congress/Gandhian women herself, she was also anxious to accommodate everyone under a broadly defined nationalist banner. In the very next month's issue of Stri Dharma however Cousins toned down and recontextualized her approach to the national movement in a way which would appear to mollify Besant's line. Here she interestingly reminded readers that "Brittania, the symbol of the English people" was also a woman, who has "not been allowed to hear the crying of" what she explicitly characterizes as the child, which was India, and even more cleverly she also called America a race of children in an equally positive way: "Indian people are ingenuous, simple, ancient, trusting children. In the United States the people are Titanic children, naive, full of energy, fearless, without suspicion." Cousins pointed out how, "because the qualities which this new form of warfare is displaying are of the nature usually characterised as feminine rather than masculine we may rightly look on this life and death struggle of India to be free as the Women's War." Cousins was here then appealing to an abstract and essentialized notion of womanhood to guide the childish and here apparently sexually neutralized races of India and America, towards world peace. Cousins asserted that this

¹⁷Cousins, "Women and National Freedom," Stri Dharma 13:7 (May 1930):289-290.

aspect of the crisis made "the Indian question world-wide in its interest and later application," as India struggled against the warfare "such as has disgraced Western civilisation through the nine million men mutually murdered on the battlefields of Europe." She advertises it therefore as "no wonder" that the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom sent a cable to Gandhi saying how it was praying for the success of the movement he was leading. She also warns however that "the whole of India is certainly not at the level of self-control that is essential for the free play of the new weapon - Soul-force" and she urges that if Swaraj is not quickly given the opportunity to prove Soul-force as an internationally applicable "woman's weapon" of pacifism may be lost to the world. She therefore urges women all over the world and presumably the "titanic" women of the U.S. to "pray that England may let go the grip of the force majeure and extend the hand of congratulation to its ward which has attained its majority ...so that Eastern and Western races, brothers and sisters from the same Aryan root stock, may be equal self-governing partners in the Indo-British Commonwealth of Nations!"¹⁸

Cousins however was not afraid to correct the Gandhi's sexist policy of leaving the care of his Ashram entirely to

¹⁸Cousins, "Notes and Comments," Stri Dharma 13:8 (June 1930):335-336. While the "notes and comments" were customarily unsigned, in this case judging by the language, there is no room for doubt that it was Cousins who penned them.

women. Cousins referred to this policy as "unnatural" and she, with others, raised a protest against his exclusion of women from the Salt marches because they would, as she quoted him, "complicate things." Cousins pointed out in a deeply ironic linguistic echo of her 1914 protest against women's exclusion from the first world war, that women in different parts of India were not satisfied with this explanation when they were "just as full of health, and patriotic self-sacrifice as their marching brothers."¹⁹

Cousins would soon after take a sort of sabbatical leave to Columbia University in New York City, to spend a year learning Domestic Science as a way to train Indian women teachers, while James Cousins taught at City College. This was in line with the AIWC's proud establishment of Lady Irwin College in Delhi for the training of Indian women in Home Science. Cousins's American stint convinced her even more of the spiritual importance of Asia to the world and of the role of Gandhi as a world mentor who could usefully front such a movement. Immediately on her return to India Cousins was shocked by the government ordinances against free speech. Cousins met with Gandhi briefly in Bombay and dramatically on her return to Madras in December of 1932 organized a rally on the beach at the conservative area of Triplicane in Madras in which she wholeheartedly encouraged people to break the

¹⁹Cousins, cited in Muthulakshmi Reddy, Mrs. Margaret Cousins and her Work in India by One Who Knows (Muthulakshmi Reddy), (Madras: WIA, 1956), 72.

ordinance laws and was promptly arrested soon after almost by design. However Cousins arranged that the moment of her arrest should not happen on the grounds of the Theosophical Society headquarters but rather at the nearby home of staunch WIA member and Gandhian activist, Ammu Swaminathan, perhaps not to embarrassingly implicate the Theosophical authorities and Besant in particular.²⁰ Cousins stated in Court that her appearance in the dock was no accident but was "the result of seventeen years living and working with her Indian sisters and brothers and her learning that exploitation and injustice through foreign rule is crushing them down:"

I would not be a worthy daughter of Ireland if I did not stand shoulder to shoulder with the wonderful women and spirited men of the Congress at this time...I am ashamed that British idealism has fallen to the present depths of oppression and suppression.²¹

Cousins refused to pay a bond or sureties for good behavior and stressed that she would continue to behave as in the past as she considered it good behavior. A commentator in Lokopakari criticized the Government's resort to sureties against and then jailing of Cousins as "not manly," asking

²⁰Lakshmi Swaminathan, interview by author, 18 December 1994, New Delhi. I am grateful to Clea Finkle for facilitating this interview.

²¹Anon., "Action Against Mrs. Cousins" Stri Dharma 16:6 (January 1933):126-131.

why, if she was guilty she did not receive a trial and proper conviction.²² The sub-inspector reported that on the beach Cousins had proclaimed that she had the backing of the Irish and American peoples. She had said that in New York and Geneva - "those centres of international opinion" she had "laid bare the dual game Britain was playing;" "its pretence of making a constitution to give India freedom but its determination to hold tight to everything essential to India's self-government." The same sub-inspector reported that Mrs Cousins was "an influential lady" and that she had "a following." Cousins made the point that it was the Government which was breaking the law rather than the rebels, and which was creating disorder rather than keeping order, by "putting the people down," destroying the health of the prisoners, grabbing buildings and looting the people by intense fines." And she described the government as the greatest terrorist of the nation. She also disseminated seditious matter. Cousins received one year's hard labor. The magistrate said there was no satisfactory arrangements there for a woman "of Cousins's status." She said she would take any status and that she knew there was room in Vellore because several ladies had been released from it recently. She eventually got her way and served her year in Vellore women's jail being released in November 1933, having again tried to reform the jail system

²² Lokopakari Madras, 15 December 1932, Native Newspaper Reports, December 1932, 923. Tamil Nadu State Archives (hereafter TNSA).

from within by organizing singing groups and planting a flower garden.²³

Besant died in 1933 while Cousins was in jail, an event which Cousins claimed in retrospect had depressed her psychically that day of Besant's death before she actually heard the news. Besant had made speeches at the first session of the Round Table Talks in London in 1930 which had little effect. Another exciting, charismatic orator and close friend of Gandhi's, Sarojini Naidu, had in some sense replaced Besant as the woman who now signified Indian national aspirations to a world audience. As early as 1925 Naidu was the first woman since Besant to preside over the Congress. The aspirations of Subbaroyan then to represent Indian womanhood at the

²³ James Cousins wrote another poem on the occasion of his wife's enforced absence:

Love Is Absent

Hills crowned with age,
And solemn seas,
Are full of sage
Philosophies.
But, lacking thee,
I am not wise:
I need thine eyes
That I may see.

Insect and bird
Chant prose and verse,
God's passion-stirred
Interpreters.
Howe'er I seek,
Their meaning slips:
I need thy lips
That they may speak.

James H. Cousins, A Wandering Harp: Selected Poems, (New York: Roerich Museum Press, 1932), 59.

Conference was thus seriously frustrated by the intervention of Naidu in that sphere in 1931.

"And now comes the news" wrote an exasperated Subbaroyan to Rathbone as early as May of 1931 that even Begum Shah Nawaz had fallen prey to Naidu's influence. Subbaroyan lamented Nawaz's changeable attitude which had caused her so much trouble at the first Round Table Conference. Subbaroyan was also concerned that the NCWI in Bombay were being influenced by a Scotch lady, Mrs Mackenzie, and Subbaroyan urged that the International Council of Women in London might write to the Bombay Council of Women on this subject, and that the Women's International League might be induced by Rathbone's behest to point out to the AIWC that reservation would not be a label of inferiority on Indian women.²⁴

Subbaroyan took great care to patronize and trivialize her colleagues' political decisions and quandaries for Rathbone, and through Rathbone to get international pressure applied to the NCWI and AIWC in order to reassure them that reservations would not be regarded as a label of inferiority. Here Subbaroyan was missing the point. The point being that the AIWC in particular wanted its proposals to be taken seriously as a symbol of the boundaries of respect which they felt were being violated. They simply wanted to be taken seriously. They also wanted the agency of Indian women to be internationally

²⁴Subbaroyan to Rathbone, 1 May 1931, Rathbone Collection.

recognized as literal and metaphoric makers of their own constitution. In her appeal for the intervention of international bodies, Subbaroyan was paralleling Cousins's appeal in Stri Dharma for world-wide support for Gandhi's "women's war" for world peace, except that Cousins would have Indian women advising the rest of the world rather than vice versa.

Cousins gave short shrift to Subbaroyan's role at the Round Table Conference in Stri Dharma of March 1931, in a piece entitled "Mrs Subbaroyan's Commonsense."²⁵ Cousins pointed out with a clipped tone of "we told you so" that Subbaroyan's statements at the Final Session "confirm the attitude taken by organised women's societies in India that the Round Table Conference could not and would not (without the presence of the people's representatives) draft an acceptable Constitution." Cousins snorted at the assessment of "one of the Indian newspapers" which had lauded Subbaroyan's position as "the only honest and logical position for those who have pinned their faith to the Sankey scheme." Quoting Subbaroyan, Cousins seems to imply that even Subbaroyan herself had been forced to recognize how "details and reservations" undid "the general principles of responsible government." Cousins underlined the gullibility of the journalist who had praised Subbaroyan, and Subbaroyan herself,

²⁵Cousins, "Mrs Subbaroyan's Commonsense" Stri Dharma 14:5 (March 1931):180.

with the finishing comment that "in reality there is only a nonexistent scheme on which many people delegates are pouring out praise! There will be nothing out of the Round Table Conference unless there is at once a general amnesty."

While Subbaroyan had no Stri Dharma at her personal disposal as a mouthpiece for her artful efforts she had, however, along with Rathbone, the support of writers for the highly influential and conservative Madras Mail who also began to write how these "few women" [the Rajwade group] were out of touch with the real pulse of Indian womanhood. Rathbone also felt that the Congress sympathizing women were "men's women rather than women's women" whereas they saw themselves as being India's women rather than Britain's women. Rathbone wrote back to Subbaroyan by return of post on 15 May 1931 on the issue of Naidu's threatened take over of all Indian women. Rathbone was not "altogether surprised, from what I know of Mrs Naidu. She is a poet and orator, but not a practical politician, nor, I think, genuinely keen about women." Rathbone also assured Subbaroyan that Sir Philip Hartog was writing to Reddy that same day on the lines Subbaroyan suggested "of course without letting her know that he has been prompted to do so." Rathbone asked Subbaroyan if she knew any men or women in positions of influence, such as "British civil servants or missionaries, or men such as Mr. Sastri, who look at things practically and are really sympathetic about women's needs, could you perhaps see them privately, showing our

Memorandum, and ask them to use their influence. Sir Philip's name should carry considerable weight with such people." She also encouraged Subbaroyan to come over to London even if Rathbone's plan to have her and Reddy as the two representatives at the Round Table's next session was unsuccessful because, as she put it: "you could help behind the scenes if not publicly" and she finished with some wisdom to Subbaroyan and Indian womanhood alike:

Don't be too depressed about it all. The mistakes the Indian ladies are falling into are not unnatural, considering their brief experience in public affairs. We had much the same difficulties to encounter here from our own extremists, although they had fifty years of emancipation and of public work which should have taught them better.²⁶

In her next letter of January 1932 Rathbone clearly stated her intention to Subbaroyan of hoping "to influence British officials and their wives quietly in our views about the franchise etc. issue while seeking to acquire information rather than impart it." In exactly the same breath she also hoped "to dispel the suspicion" which, as she wrote, "I know exists among those Indian women whom I encounter" and added interestingly "but I shall not force this in any way."²⁷ Rathbone did meet Kaur at Lahore on her trip to India and

²⁶Rathbone to Subbaroyan, 15 May 1931, Rathbone Collection.

²⁷Rathbone to Subbaroyan, 8 January 1932, Rathbone Collection.

thought her "a very able and charming young lady" who unfortunately however in Rathbone's view was against the wifehood qualification as she wrote a year later to Mrs P.K. Ray of Calcutta who also represented a moderate line of dissent from the Rajwade group.²⁸ Rathbone explained her frustration at the resentment of Indian women about British women's interference in Indian affairs as unfair when British men "should be expected to express views and exercise influence, while British women are asked to keep their hands off." It was Kaur who would best and most forcefully articulate the resentment of Indian women regarding Rathbone's imperial designs on the franchise issue but not until February 1935 two years after Kaur, Reddy and Rajwade would travel to London and present their views to a government which outraged them by marginalizing their issue and then ignoring their perspective in their formulation of the franchise proposals. Kaur objected to the British Government's listening to "British women who stood up for what they thought were our just demands than to us whose cry (vide the case of the men daily in the Assembly) is always a cry in the wilderness....It all seems so tragic that we should say these things again and again and again and only to be told that "We know much better than you."

Rathbone argued that Indian women should realize that English women had also received the vote in a piecemeal step

²⁸Rathbone to Ray, 9 March 1933, Rathbone Papers.

by step procedure and that they were being overly "touchy" on the point.²⁹ The AIWC responded that Indian women were under no compulsion to follow the example of British women in this, and increasingly, in any matter. As the Civil Disobedience movement escalated, Kaur and Rajwade stiffened in their opposition to what they felt were the continued insults of the government on the women's franchise issue. Kaur felt that there was no point in giving evidence to the Lothian committee regarding separate electorates: "when the same deliberately ignored us and we are really made to look like utter fools...I personally am not willing to lose my self-respect anymore." Kaur's comment in 1935 that "a start on the wrong basis means disaster ab initio and can never lead to the ultimate true goals" sounds like an articulation of Cousins's long cherished firmness about instituting the franchise in a symbolic "all or nothing from the beginning" spirit.³⁰

What then was Cousins's profile throughout all this intrigue? A year before the Rathbone/Kaur exchange Cousins responded to Kaur's frustration with the Rathbone/Subbaroyan coalition of how Rathbone was "one of our friends who means to be a helper of India but often through ignorance or Englishness does us more harm than good. But a far more dangerous enemy to all our work is Mrs Subbaroyan:"

²⁹Rathbone to Kaur, 9 January 1935, Rathbone Collection.

³⁰Amrit Kaur to Rathbone, 11 February 1935, Rathbone Collection.

I do not want to put on paper all that I could tell you about her as I have known and rated her during 17 years. Don't forget that she was President of the Madras Constituency Women's Conference the year I was in Europe 1928, and took part in an acrimonious newspaper discussion re the Divorce resolution a year later of the similar Conf. She is damnably clever. She has always done creditable social service work but always individualistically (what a word unexpectedly!). It is nothing less than a disaster that she has been appointed to Geneva and to the two important gatherings. I wrote to Rani Rajwade that our Conference should have taken immediate steps to make the Geneva officials understand that she was not representative of organised Indian womanhood and was an instrument of Government.³¹

In response to what apparently was Kaur's double checking on whether Cousins had changed her position on the franchise policy by May 1934, Cousins replied that she was still implacably opposed to accepting any reserved seats under any conditions." But the cut and dried assured tone and the firmness of her opinion is striking:

It is not done in any other nation. Why should Indian women lower themselves and their manhood by accepting a technique which infers that they need more protection than any other women in the world. Muthulakshmi was the most independent of the nominated women and she found that she had to resign so as to express her opinion of the Govt. who put her in.³²

Cousins continues by encouraging Kaur to draft a letter and

³¹Cousins to Kaur, 1 May 1934. AIWC Papers, Roll 11, File 23.

³²Ibid.

reminding her to take care to point out that Subbaroyan has not attended any of the All - India sessions of the AIWC: "Let your letter be a proof of the conditions of subjection (political) in which awakened and democratic women in India find themselves, flouted by a power which uses favouritism rather than representation - for its own purposes."

The opinion of Cousins and the AIWC on Subbaroyan as somewhat of a government puppet was not lost on Gandhi and he tried in vain to win Subbaroyan over to the AIWC opposition to communal reservations in 1933.³³ Gandhi's support was much appreciated by the trio cadre of Rajwade, Kaur and Reddy who were now masterminding the united front of the three main women's organizations for an adult, non-communally based franchise, believing as they did that the communal virus should not enter the women's organizations, while at the very same time in order precisely to prevent communal splits in the AIWC they dismissed the voices of Muslim dissenters on the communal issue.³⁴

³³Reddy to "Madam," 16 November 1935. Reddy Papers, File 20. "We may also draw the attention of Congress to statements made by Mahatma Gandhi at the Second Round Table Conference....He asked Mrs Subbarayan, the woman delegate to the R.T.C., to withdraw her demand for reservation of seats for women in the legislatures. All the same, Mrs. Subbarayan urged for reservation for women pleading that women in India would find it difficult to contest with men in a general Constituency."

³⁴Geraldine Forbes, "Votes for Women: the Demand for Women's Franchise in India 1917-1937," In Vina Mazumdar, Symbols of Power: Studies on the Political Status of Women in India (Bombay, Allied Publishers, 1979), 15. Cousins referred to Jinnah in March 1931 as "pessimistic Mr Jinnah"

1933 saw the disclosure of the contents of the White Paper of the Parliamentary Joint Franchise Committee which dismayed and alarmed "the Rajwade group" because it further reduced the possible voting power of women now to 1:10 as well as making the communal award a basis for the franchise. On 2 September 1932 Rathbone had written to Subbaroyan of how sorry she was that she Subbaroyan and all the women's organizations felt so strongly opposed to the communal reservation of seats for women and she urged Subbaroyan to try to prevent a boycott of seats. Rathbone justified her appeal on the basis that:

the strong communalists will persuade tame women of their sort to stand....the advanced women will have lost their opportunity of acting as a force in favour of social reforms and will incur - if you will forgive me speaking frankly - a terrible responsibility towards the unemancipated women who are suffering from such evils as child marriage, illiteracy, purdah etc., and if the tame women so stand and get elected, they will strengthen the communal spirit instead of weakening it.³⁵

Rathbone suggested that if "strong women" accepted the communal basis that they could still stand together "and as far as possible ignore communal differences, thus acting as a

whose oratory, along with that of British diplomatists it was "a waste of time to discuss," without "a speedy general amnesty of prisoners and the withdrawal of the Repressive ordinances." Cousins, "Notes and Comments," Stri Dharma 14:5 (March 1931):175-177. Here again while the editorial piece is unsigned by Cousins the section in general bears her hallmark writing style.

³⁵Rathbone to Subbaroyan, 2 September 1932, Rathbone Collection.

living force and example of joint national action." Rathbone was anxious to present her case as women pitted directly against men, arguing that if communal parties "co-opted" women they would be "mens' women and not women's women" and she cites anti-feminist pressures in the British parliament as well as Indian politicians as among the hostile forces she was battling. Rathbone then resorted to contacting Dorothy Jinarajadasa directly and on 18 January 1933 Jinarajadasa replied to her that while she agreed that adult franchise could still be the ultimate goal she was personally open to practical compromise and hoped Reddy was also, although she suspected that the AIWC leadership "possibly will not [be]." Jinarajadasa also said however that she was out of touch with the WIA by then as she was entirely occupied with the children's aid work for "the destitute delinquent children."³⁶ It is hardly surprising that Rathbone appears to have avoided contact with Cousins entirely, most probably writing her off as a lost cause from the start.

By the time a White Paper report was published in 1933 the proposed ratio of women to men voters dropped from the 1:2 proposed in the Simon Commission report to 1:7. Outraged by the continued evisceration of the proposed woman's franchise and more so by the way the commission ignored the voices of the three women's bodies, this time the three women's

³⁶Dorothy Jinarajadasa to Rathbone, 18 January 1933, Rathbone Collection.

organizations met in Bombay in April 1933. They accepted adult franchise for the towns under the thinking that in the towns lay the most literate and politicized women who would in the future work to uplift their rural sisters, and they agreed to literacy and property qualifications for both sexes. Cousins argued that a literacy qualification was an important one until women were politically educated as otherwise she worried that the votes of the uneducated would be manipulated by landowning interests. It was the issue of the wifehood qualification which continued to be the point of contention between Rathbone's supporters and the AIWC/WIA and some British organizations. Rathbone established the British Committee for Indian Women's Franchise (BCWIF). The BCWIF tried to break the impasse by easing the educational qualification to a simple literacy test and eliminating the need for qualified women to tackle the considerable bureaucracy and practical blocks involved in applying for the vote.

The role of Gandhi and the Congress in shaping the changing positionality of what Subbaroyan accurately termed the "Rajwade group" as the staunch defenders of the idea of the "fair field and no favour" "theory" was an important one. Cousins's commitment to Gandhi and the Congress simplified somewhat some of the complex pressures on the Rajwade group to appear to be holding a firm and theoretically correct line for the image of the Indian woman. Rajwade was anyhow the chair of

the AIWC's franchise committee in 1933 and increasingly placed all the loyal faith of the AIWC executive in the moral spirit of the Naidu-Gandhian world view at that point: "I know women's rights will be safe in Gandhiji's hands but I wanted a direct representative from our Conference in order to raise our status as the most important women's organisation in India."³⁷ The Congress had resolved at the Karachi Congress as early as 1931 for adult franchise, a resolution in part prompted by the women's participation in the Salt marches and in picketing of foreign cloth shops and liquor shops. To some extent critics of "the Rajwade group" such as Subbaroyan and another indirect correspondent of Rathbone's group, Eleanor Mac Dougall, principal of the Women's Christian College of Madras, in a letter to one Mrs Gray, a Londoner, assessed that the "sublime" position of the Rajwade group was in part caused by the fear on the part of the AIWC that "they may seem less idealistic than the WIA and then there is the desire of unity with it, and also the dislike of raising the old disputes and personal acrimonies which the question aroused in 1931 and 1932." There is a great deal of truth in her assessment as is evident in the moulding of opinion between prominent figures in both the WIA and AIWC and in which throughout the entire period the spirit of Cousins hovered behind the scenes as an ideological touchstone of rightness to the younger ginger "Rajwade group" as much as did Gandhi or Naidu.

³⁷ Kaur to Rajwade, 11 April 1931, AIWC Roll 2, File 11.

MacDougall however presented Gandhi's plea against untouchability as somehow "ruining the" religion of Hinduism (having already ruined their trade) as she advertised a prevalent anti-Gandhian bitterness; "it is a real matter with them of the defence of religion against a traitor." MacDougall never quite specified who the "them" were who saw Gandhi now as a traitor of Hinduism.³⁸

However when Gandhi in 1933 shifted his weight from a position of non-co-operation with the government, to a pact in which he would co-operate with the government in exchange for reforms of untouchability laws, the women's organizations, as Geraldine Forbes clinches it, "had the rug pulled from under their feet."³⁹ Reddy felt that since Gandhi himself was justifying co-operation for the sake of removing untouchability, then why should not women strike similar bargains? As she put it: "women social workers and educationists are eager to get the maximum for themselves."⁴⁰ Indeed it seemed quite clear then that Gandhi's maneuver with the British provided no magic carpet for the adult franchise policy of the AIWC. However the AIWC leaders and Cousins could

³⁸Eleanor Mac Dougall to Mrs Gray, 26 January, 1933, Rathbone Collection.

³⁹Geraldine Forbes, "Votes for Women: the Demand for Women's Franchise in India 1917-1937," in Vina Mazumdar Symbols of Power: Studies on the Political Status of Women in India (Bombay, Allied Publishers, 1979), 16.

⁴⁰Reddy to Rajwade, 13 February 1933, AIWC Papers, Roll 2, File 21.

hardly publicly blame Gandhi for his apparent turn around when he had never asked them to bind themselves to his leadership in the first place. Gandhi was of course also responding to a complex set of pressures, the women's franchise issue being just one amongst them. The AIWC then tried to make the Congress accountable to Gandhi's "promise" for Congress support of women candidates in the 1936 elections with however little success. In any event MacDougall's characterization of the Rajwade group as naive proponents of the theoretical "sublime" was repeated in Subbaroyan's newspaper article in the Sunday Chronicle of 26 February 1933.⁴¹ Under a sub-title of "Theoretic Equality is Extreme Inequality" Subbaroyan repeated her pragmatist position and also used the space to tell how Congress had defaulted on its promises to womanhood. She explained how although she had originally been asked to stand for election to the Legislative Assembly for the Coimbatore-Salem-North Arcot constituency of Madras Presidency that prominent Congress leader in the province, C. Rajagopalachariar, after the Tamil Nadu Provincial Conference of the Congress, decided instead to put up a male Congress candidate. Subbaroyan reported how she tried to remind Rajagopalachariar of "Gandhi's assurance" to her at the Round Table Conference that Congress would support women candidates for the legislatures, but Rajagopalachariar was unmoved.

⁴¹Mrs K. Radhabai Subbaroyan, "The Women's Franchise under the New Constitution," Sunday Chronicle 26 February, 1933.

Subbaroyan withdrew her candidacy from the election recognizing the great difficulty she would face in electioneering without Congress support. Reddy herself formed the same conclusion on Rajagopalachariar although it was not until her 1964 autobiography that she criticized him as a conservative and reactionary on women's issues.⁴² Cousins was also very much in favor of the women's candidates sticking by Congress as she warned AIWC colleagues in 1936 that the policy of standing women for election as independents had been tried unsuccessfully in Europe: "It is better for you to stand steady for Congress and keep faith with it and with us who asked for your selection, even if you fail - than to wobble and stand as an Independent."⁴³ Cousins's concern not to

⁴² Muthulakshmi Reddy, Autobiography: A Pioneer Woman Legislator (Madras: 1964), 105; Reddy was grateful to Rathbone for her enormous trouble in collecting statistics of child-marriage and for pointing out how the government, both British and Indian had failed to look after the health of the mothers and children - "the primary concern of any civilised Government." Ibid. Reddy fashioned her feminism explicitly after that of Josephine Butler, the late nineteenth century British moral crusader against the double standard and the Contagious Diseases acts which affected the colonies greatly. See Reddy's references to Butler throughout her Papers.

⁴³ "I have heard from members of these Parliamentary Committees that every election is reducing itself to a matter of communalism and the sheer counting of votes locally, and that the merit of the candidate just doesn't count, and especially is this the case in the reserved seats. The very best women candidates are being turned down in favour of some practically unknown woman because the number of communal votes for her will win the election for Congress. It makes us despair. It is better for you to stand steady for Congress and keep faith with it and with us who asked for your selection, even if you fail - than to wobble and stand as an Independent. As the latter you cannot call

alienate Congress sympathizers from the AIWC arose most strikingly on the occasion of clashing dates of the AIWC annual meeting with that of the Congress in Ahmedabad in 1936. Cousins's plea for the AIWC to back down and reschedule their meeting around that of the Congress tells us how she felt it would be counter-productive for the general image of the AIWC to appear to compete with the Congress:

there will be forced on us a choice of loyalties and we Congress women will be in a most distressful dilemma which can only be much more harmful to the reputation of the Conference than any diminution of tamasha and numbers in Ahmedabad and sure when the wider public of A'bad would know why we insist on

yourself the representative of the AIWC unless you get special permission from the Central Executive.

Re 19,20,21,22, I am personally opposed to our Conference or any of our women's organisations putting forward their own Candidates for any of the Legislative elections whom they wish to stand and work as Independents, unattached to either Party. Such candidature will antagonise all sides, will split votes without necessarily securing the election of the woman, and even if a woman be elected she will have no backing later in the Legislature to enable her to secure the reforms we stand for.

At first after women got the vote in Western countries they tried the policy of getting women elected as Independents, but in practice it was found unsuccessful. Please record my vote against No 19 and in favour of 22 which I believe will effectually secure the neutrality of our Conference, retain the affectionate regard of the people generally for our organisations, and enable us to make use of the people returned under the Party system to get the laws we want passed through the Machinery of the Legislatures. I have myself urged very strongly on the members of the Parliamentary Board of Madras Presidency the necessity of selecting more women candidates for the Congress Party in this Presidency for the Assembly. The women themselves are alas the chief obstacle, because of their depreciatory Complex! Cousins to "Dear Friend, "19 September 1936. AIWC Papers Roll 10, File 2.

the earlier date they would rally all the more to us.⁴⁴

Cousins's comment in the margin of the same letter above that even Besant sacrificed attending the annual Theosophical Convention for the sake of the Congress meetings suggests how important Cousins thought Congress sympathy was now for the AIWC, and how solid she thought Besant's nationalism.

In any event the representation of the Rajwade group and the WIA as being influenced by Congress, and therefore as "men's women" rather than as "women's women" by Subbaroyan, Rathbone, and the Madras Mail alike, and their simultaneous representation as elite theoreticians out of touch with the national masses, suggests how Cousins's and the Rajwades group's theoretical stance occupied an impossible situation. It was positioned between a double backlash. While on the one hand the Rajwade trio, and Kaur and Cousins in particular, were strong supporters of the Congress and of being seen to be backing up their men (whatever of their men's touted "feminine" tactics) in part this alliance was designed to allay the suspicions of the popular Congress movement and "men" in general about the AIWC and WIA as elite non-nationalist groups and as selfish individualist feminists involved in a foreign styled "sex war." And for that Congress

⁴⁴Cousins to Ammu Swaminathan, 22 November 1936, AIWC Papers, Roll 17, File 33.

support they were dubbed party politicians who were apt to splinter the AIWC which included many government workers. At the same time they were also labelled elite theoreticians whose naive and "sublime" position of a transcendental Utopian moment of sexual equality was called unIndian by commentators for the Madras Mail who professed to be far more sensitive and concerned for the daily livelihoods and political enfranchisement of the rural masses of Indian women, many of whom could in fact neither read nor afford the Madras Mail even if they "theoretically" had more access to Stri Dharma which Cousins was careful to translate into Tamil and Telegu in order to increase its accessibility to all classes. It is also interesting that when the AIWC women shifted positions throughout the controversy they were accused of being easily influenced and when they refused to change their minds they were accused of being too tunnel visioned and obstinate.

Some conclusions may be drawn from the above rather circuitous evidentiary base as a way to look at some of the rhetorical contradictions involved in Indian decolonization and Cousins's reflective position therein. The AIWC's claim to represent the nation of Indian women was after all no more or less legitimate than the Congress' claim to do likewise for both sexes.⁴⁵ The "obstinacy" of the Rajwade group was founded

⁴⁵ Cousins to Kaur, 27 February 1933, AIWC Papers, Roll 8, File 14. "While doing right in that sad matter we must be very careful not to give our muslim sisters cause for sensitiveness. All our efforts must be towards retaining unity and friendship with them whatever happens."

on issues of collective national self-respect/esteem, hence their angry insistence that they should not be talked at or ignored. Cousins delicately anchored much of this obstinacy "from behind", via her personal relations with the Rajwade group, although having proposed the agenda she then left it to themselves to uphold while she was in jail from December 1932, and was thereafter preoccupied trying to keep the conference together. If Cousins's voice was pivotal in the AIWC it was in offering a clear and firm sense of direction and support at moments of confusion and conflict. But if her voice functioned as a pressure moulding the voices of the AIWC into one, so did that of Gandhi, and the policies of the Congress. Overall it seems that there was a subtle unspoken hierarchy in the AIWC in which Cousins's authority was often placed over that of Reddy, by Rajwade and Kaur. This perhaps because Cousins nationalist colors had been tried and proved true while Reddy was far less of a Congress woman. The AIWC were guided by an anxiety not to be seen to "let down" Cousins, Congress, and Gandhi, while at the same time they were anxious for international respect as women who were speaking up for themselves without letting the Indian "side" down.

Whatever complex of personal politics Subbaroyan represented, her underhand ways of sabotaging the Rajwade group by posing herself as a feminist "pragmatist" and smearing the WIA by contrast as "the Adyar Feminine

politicians," or as alien western theorists and Congress puppets, merely shows how British feminist imperialists had ready collaborators amongst Indian women in the imperial decisions about women's franchise. Subbaroyan's dubbing of women's democratic rights as alien to Indian culture worked nicely as the double agent for both conservative patriarchy at home and British feminist maternalism. The controversy also shows how in certain specific circumstances Cousins's interventionist position as a foreign born national was almost automatically invalidated in certain quarters, regardless of what her nationalist resume reflected.

It is also ironic that Rathbone's citation of "women's women" and their special reformist qualities, as a way to get some women into power, echoed much of the earlier rhetoric used by Cousins and the WIA and the AIWC, as a way to get women's voice included in the national sphere. But no matter how laudable Cousins had found the maternal and wifely cultural specialties of "the Indian woman," when it came down to the question of her image in the eyes of the world Cousins would allow her to settle for nothing less than an individually based value as a citizen.

Cousins also did not want to be let down by Indian nationalists in the face of the world, because that would suggest that Indian culture was ridden by selfish politics and thus might not be the world savior after all. Therefore she had to continue blaming the British rather than Indian

nationalists for the constant general ignoring of the women's voices. Cousins was anxious to maintain, at least for world image, a sense of the unisex India as wronged by a vicious "Prussianist" British government. Any notion of sexual antagonism between Indian men and women was not allowable to mention.

Cousins was compelled to follow a nationalist path in India because for her to take up a Besantite Dominion status line in the late 1930s toward the early 1940s would have been political suicide for her at the national level; she refused to plough that lonely non-nationalist furrow which Subbaroyan martyrishly claimed she was following in her aloofness from Congress, and which Cousins had earlier advocated for Irish feminism. In India Cousins needed to be firmly on the Congress side or she would have gotten lost entirely as an irrelevant neo-imperial outsider. But then Cousins made her conscious choices with reference to new age laws which sanctioned the moral rightness of whatever revolutionary movement was being carried along by the "time-spirit." Moving with the "time-spirit" in this case simply meant backing Congress as the odds on favorite of the moment.

In 1936 Cousins was elected President of the AIWC after an interesting controversy over the issue of canvassing for the President. Mrs Rustoomji Faridoonji, a quite sentimental AIWC founding member, thought that the younger members of the conference might by now not be aware of Cousins's significance

in the early AIWC and thought she should canvass support for Cousins's election to the presidency. Cousins was embarrassed and irritated by Faridoonji's well meaning patronage, pointing out that presidential candidates should not need to canvass. The issue is illustrative of how distant Cousins had become from a central position in the AIWC, as she concerned herself more and more after her release from jail in November 1933 with local women's issues in Andhra Pradesh. Cousins's long time Madrasi colleague Ammu Swaminathan notes how Cousins was never quite the same after her period in jail and took some time to recover her energies. Having been made a president Cousins found that she actually had less leverage within the organization than before, owing to involved constitutional mechanics of the organization which Cousins was of course eager to respect.

Even before she was made President of the AIWC however, in February 1935, Cousins soberly sketched the "history, future and anxieties" of the AIWC. Cousins lamented how the AIWC's choices had been completely ignored by the Joint Parliamentary Report on the Franchise; how the Child Marriage Restraint Act was useless; and how AIWC nominees to the League of Nations Commissions and International Labour Office were ignored. She felt at this point that the AIWC needed to be reconstituted - it needed to throw in its lot with the movement for Self-Government:

Our heads are in the stars and we have feet but they are not on mother earth. We are where all India is, without control in its own home.....We find ourselves face to face with a position in which all our women in "the [government] Services" will have to remain behind reiterating the ideals and marking time and doing nursery bed experiments but the mass of women of this country must move on with the flood-tide of life towards effort (still as the women's conference) for securing self-government as the basic means of securing the aims and putting into effect the reforms and the constitutional status that the Conference itself has formulated. Women who are free cannot sacrifice their self-respect. They cannot for long allow their demands to be flouted, their personnel to be overlooked, their schemes to be overlooked, their schemes to be frustrated. They will find themselves driven to join the National struggle on all its fronts in order that they may get their share of control over the nation-building forces of finances, legislation, and administration.⁴⁶

Cousins was out campaigning for Congress nominee Hannah Angelo in 1936 and in fact had to restrain Angelo from running as an independent when Angelo wanted to. 1936 saw much criticism of the AIWC. Jawaharlal Nehru wrote to the AIWC complaining that so many of the items in the AIWC programme were superficial and did not "enquire in to the root cases of the evils." Naidu also wrote to Cousins of how the AIWC needed to do more than pass resolutions.⁴⁷ Cousins confronted such critics of the AIWC

⁴⁶Cousins, "History of Indian Women's Movement; Its Achievements and Future Work and Anxieties," Stri Dharma 18:4 (February 1935): 150-155.

⁴⁷Ibid., 387. "It didn't I may hear say, always remain non-political and united. By and by it came out on the side of Indian freedom, but without alliance to any political party; and the development of Mr Jinnah's campaign took away a number of Mohammedan members." And Naidu to Cousins, "Can't attend AIWC. But I am sending a message to be read out. You know that I take a great interest in the progress

in her presidential speech at the AIWC annual conference at Ahmedabad in 1936 replying that "this is a world complaint. Let us be humble. Let us study more."⁴⁸ Cousins used the national media's attention to her presidential speech to proclaim once again, as she had also done the previous year in Stri Dharma that this was the psychological moment when the

of the Conference and unlike many who are within its fold I do not consider that it has achieved nothing. On the contrary I think that it has been a great source of awakening and inspiration throughout India for women who would otherwise have had no opportunity for public life. It has aroused a sense of duty and responsibility however limited in its scope and imperfect in its practical results as yet. I think considering the composition of the conference it has made remarkable progress in these eleven years since you -for it was you-called it into being and convened the initial sessions at Poona. But now I think it is high time for the Conference to concentrate on solid work instead of too many resolutions. There must be close touch with actual conditions and a more intimate study of the real problems that cry for urgent redress and solution. If this be accomplished I think the Women's Conference will have a very high place and purpose in the national life while it keeps very wisely and rightly clear of all controversial issues and devotes its energies to constructive labours for the benefit of women. Don't you agree?. Naidu to Cousins, 20 December 1936, AIWC Papers, Roll 14, File 31: Also see Nehru to Ammu Swaminathan : "You will notice that we are at one with you in your programme. But I feel that many items in your programme are, if I may say so, superficial in the sense that they do not enquire into the root causes of the evils which we want to get rid of. Partly no doubt these evils are due to our own customs, but largely they are the consequences of political subjection and a thoroughly bad economic system. Thus we are forced to consider the political problems as well as the economic problem in its many ramifications." Nehru to Swaminathan, 2 September 1936, AIWC Papers Roll 12, File 18.

⁴⁸Cousins, "National Govt., a Racial Birthright: Presidential Address at All-India Women's Conference," Leader 26 December 1936.

conference should take a step forward:

to declare its unity with the yearning of awakened India for the free control of its destinies....The demand for Swaraj is not a party question. National self-government is a racial birth right above the divisions of party ways and means of securing it or maintaining it.⁴⁹

She also responded to the general malaise with the direction of the AIWC from both within:

when personalities begin to creep in, when it is difficult to get fresh workers, and young people seem to be only frivolous, even our own women members are tempted to turn critical. I am not one such. I would like someone to write as my epitaph. "One of the Encouragers."⁵⁰

Cousins called for a raising of the economic and legal status of women who work in the home, attributing to the non-payment of house wives the lack of self respect which she constantly referred to now as the root source of Indian women's problems. Without it she argued "women can not have self-respect or self-reliance but imbibe an inferiority complex, thinking also that her great hard work of caring and mothering for the race is her curse instead of her worthy vocation."

While Cousins worked tirelessly for changes in child - bearing and child - rearing, she also promoted birth control in defiance of what she called Gandhi's 'medieval' belief in

⁴⁹Ibid.

⁵⁰Ibid.

ahimsa and natural self control.⁵¹ In 1935 Cousins encouraged and welcomed American birth control activist Margaret Sanger whom she had met in New York in 1931, as "one of the liberators of womanhood from the curse of Eve," to give demonstrations on artificial birth control in India.⁵² Three years earlier Cousins had written a piece in the Theosophist in which she hailed Margaret Sanger as the next incarnation of Annie Besant, noting how Besant's feminist career had also been launched by her campaign for birth control in England.⁵³ Cousins however felt that birth control was just a "middle step" in spiritual evolution for control over the "desire nature," after which she declared that Sanger -

has it in her nature to delve into the mysteries and to soar into the ecstasies of the Divine marriage, and to realize that there can be a transmutation of sex into that union with life in all its beings and manifestations so absolute that no necessity is felt for any separated specific

⁵¹Cousins to Margaret Sanger, February 11 1935, Sanger Collection, Library of Congress, Carton 25, reel 17.

⁵²See Barbara N. Ramusack, "Embattled advocates: the debate over birth control in India, 1920-1940," In eds., C. Johnson-Odim and M. Strobel Expanding the Boundaries of Women's History, (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1992), 173-202. And an Unsigned letter from AIWC office to Cousins: "It is really sad to think how our some of [sic] thinking people whom we would have expected to know better to have taken such a narrow attitude upon Miss Sanger. It seems that religion in these cases is at the root of all;" Unsigned to Cousins, 4 April 1936, AIWC papers, Roll 19, File 3.

⁵³Cousins, "Margaret Sanger: Rebel, Scientist, Liberator," Theosophist (October 1932);80-84.

Beloved.⁵⁴

Cousins felt that Sanger had "scotched the serpent" and was ready to "turn her brilliant and mystical Irish nature" "to take her place amongst the little band who are leading humanity to a Paradise regained where Perfect Love will have cast out fear?"

In 1935 Cousins once more cast her understanding of the evils of maternal essentialism in a sort of biblical parable-like style.

The difficulties that we women feel all have their root in sex. It is remarkable that our great privilege of creating and bringing human life to birth has been also our undoing. Instead of the endowment of motherhood there has been the exploitations of mother-hood, and alas! that lack of a free field and no favour is like a serpent ever rearing its head out of the grass ready to strike us down.⁵⁵

Cousins commended Sanger for having her own vision of "free field and no favour" - "She is leading her colleagues through thick and thin to secure that field and clear it of all old stumps of jungle and refuse."⁵⁶ Cousins's vista on Indian

⁵⁴Ibid., 84.

⁵⁵Cousins, "Presidential Address to Ninth Session of Mysore State Womens' Conference", Stri Dharma 18:3 (January 1935): 104.

⁵⁶Cousins, "Margaret Sanger: Rebel, Scientist, Liberator," Theosophist (October 1932):80-84.

gender problems was to a large extent blinkered by the Brahmanizing Vedicist and Victorian values of woman's purity, so that little account was taken by such birth control advocates of lower caste women's pressures to reproduce the labor supply.⁵⁷ In line with the general expansion of Brahmin cultural and sexual values in circles of South Indian reformism, Cousins's emphasis on a cultural and spiritual motherhood over physical human reproduction contradicted the internal logic of the caste system which demanded a labor supply from the lower castes.

It is useful here to note that Cousins's "access" to popular opinion, orthodoxy, and conservatism was most likely mediated to her through the experience of Muthulakshmi Reddy. From several ideological angles Muthulakshmi Reddy fits the profile of the Victorian social purity crusader - indeed Josephine Butler was one of her primary inspirations. And Reddy's valorization of sexual purity and the reform of temple dancing and brothels etc. constituted an attempt to reform sexual practice to an idealized Hindu past. To what extent did Cousins or Reddy then really challenge, much less try to dismantle patriarchy? To what extent was Cousins's consciousness almost inevitably limited by a Brahmanical vision of the gendering of the new Indian subject by definition of Theosophy's mesh with Brahmin and Brahmanizing cadres in South India? While Cousins valued Birth Control as

⁵⁷I am grateful to Uma Charkravarty for this critique.

a device to ease the lot of an overburdened motherhood she did not quite cast her support for Birth Control in terms of how it could lend women control of their bodies as this would have appeared to her to have been "individualistic". However she placed the freedom which some women, or women some of the time, could enjoy in an overall social context whereby the non-mother could contribute her energies through the metaphor of a social and cultural motherhood. For Cousins the non-mother could be a teacher, nurse, magistrate or fulfill any number of socially constructive community roles. Ultimately Cousins articulated no desire to break from the maternalist paradigm of social reform, repeatedly marking her socially-engaged activism as a crucial self-reassuring choice against the impoverishing individualist isolationism which she perceived in the alternative mode of the spiritual ascetic.

During the year of her AIWC presidency Cousins also argued for many practical innovations such as the establishment of a permanent central office in Delhi, a whole time travelling secretary and information library, and she repeated her constant appeal for an increase in local workers to staff a variety of ventures such as schools, hostels, women's parks, classes in Hindi, clinics, rural training schemes, demonstrations of communal unity, anti-drink campaigns and Harijan services. Cousins perhaps hoped to satisfy the conscience and the prestige of the wealthy by suggesting a fund for the building of separate Harijan

(Untouchables) wells with donors' names inscribed on them for Harijans in the villages.

From 1935 Cousins radicalized her feminist vision, seeing, with Gandhi and others, the true path of Swaraj to lie in economic self-sufficiency at the village level. For this reason in her 1936 presidential speech she urged her AIWC sisters to get in touch with "our sisters in the villages, fields, factories," to live in a village as Gandhi was: "so that we may get to grips with it... only through the documentation of the heart will we get the courage and will to plan wisely."⁵⁸ Since 1917 Cousins had been active at the local level encouraging the spinning and sale of khaddar as an alternative to British fabric although curiously she never joined formally with Gandhi's All India Village Industries Association, as her protege Kamaladevi Chattopadhyaya later would.

Cousins also had a very "grass roots" vision of the problems of women in the mines and factories, arguing that unless there was some alternative means of employment provided for the women mine workers there was no use in taking them out of the mines regardless of how inhumane the conditions were there, especially when the women themselves objected to their eviction. Cousins was alert to certain European women such as Frau Munthe of the Geneva Labour Office, who as Cousins told

⁵⁸ Cousins, "National Govt., a Racial Birthright: Presidential Address at All-India Women's Conference," Leader 26 December 1936.

Kaur, "never forgave us for challenging the pet scheme for taking women out of the mines but she fails to realise that 'home' conditions in India and elsewhere are quite different."⁵⁹ It was also Cousins who asked for an investigation into the Naikin jobber system, where women bosses exploited other women workers in the factories. In order to counteract problems of women in capitalistic development Cousins set to drawing up a rural workers' training scheme for women to train other women in setting up village industries, in educating other women about health care, and in voting rights.

Cousins was also in these latter years of her active life in India frustrated by the lack of drive and commitment on the part of younger women activists who rarely had the passion of women of her own generation, as she despaired in a letter to Urmila Mehta on another woman's reluctance to take responsibility:

Her sensitiveness about who should do it is new to me. Whoever has a thing at heart should be free to do anything and everything for it, especially when few people are throwing themselves into it. Better to over do than under do. We are not yet at a time for being finicky about precedent, prestige, etc.....⁶⁰

⁵⁹Cousins to Kaur, 1 May 1934, AIWC Papers Roll 12, File 19.

⁶⁰Cousins to Urmila Mehta, 1 April 1942, AIWC Papers, Roll 14, File 12.

Cousins was chronically disappointed with the general lack of enthusiasm for "hands on" grass roots everyday activism, often finding the younger women activists frivolous, shallow and lacking in the "real spirit" of the "pioneering" women of her own generation. In 1942 Cousins was invited to supervise the first Women Workers' Training Camp at Abrama in Gujurat, a scheme which was largely her brain child. The Training scheme was Cousins's attempt to tackle some of the social and economic problems of women from the ground up.

By the early 1940s Cousins commanded the stature of the grand old lady of the Conference, subtly patronizing the leading executive trio by telling them hopefully how she called them "the three musketeeresses." Cousins never had any problem accepting the authority which younger organizers bestowed on her, all in the name of the good cause.⁶¹ Cousins often proudly referred to her notable proteges such as Chattopadhyaya and Reddy as her "spiritual daughters," and likewise her AIWC junior members often made a point of publicly proclaiming Cousins as "the Mother of the

⁶¹Honored Organising Secretary of the AIWC Urmila Mehta wrote to Cousins in 1942: "The [Abrama] Camp really needs personal encouragement from persons like yourself." Mehta to Cousins, undated (Spring 1942?) AIWC Papers Roll 17 File 13. And Cousins to Mehta: "I'm glad to hear you have given Kamaladevi such splendid help. I call you three "the three musketeeresses." Every new experiment gets only a few to give themselves wholly to it in the beginning. It's really a help that way rather than a disadvantage." Cousins to Mehta, 10 March 1942, AIWC Papers, Roll 17 File 31.

Conference."⁶² Reddy wrote in Stri Dharma that she "would even go so far as to say that she has been a mother to us all."⁶³ After Cousins's stint as President of the AIWC however she realised she had in fact far less powers of executive intervention in the Standing Committee than before, and in any event Standing Committee members by the mid thirties had no hesitation in making decisions and taking initiative, while the founding generation of the Conference gracefully withdrew to the back benches.

While within the AIWC Cousins still intervened with prodding suggestions through the appropriate bureaucratic channels, increasingly she was obliged to process her interventionist image rather more carefully for wider audiences vis-a-vis the heated nationalist consciousness of the early 1940s. In 1941 Cousins published her third book, Indian Womanhood Today which is remarkable for its super sensitive revisions in tone and perspective since the Awakening of Asian Womanhood in 1922.⁶⁴ Her preface reflects Cousins's deliberate desire to be seen as uncertain in her sense of authority to speak about Indian women. Here she checks herself constantly for slips in arrogance and over

⁶²James Cousins, "Addendum" to Indian Womanhood Today (Allahabad: Kitabistan, 1947; reprint), 190.

⁶³Reddy, "Branch Reports," Stri Dharma 28:4 (May/June, 1937):295.

⁶⁴Cousins, Indian Womanhood Today, (Allahabad: Kitabistan, 1941), 8.

generalization, aware now of that "touchiness" and "self consciousness" on the part of Indian readers which should be handled with kid gloves. She also tells of how she hesitated to update her earlier book for so long because:

the very passage of time had brought my Indian sisters into publicity as their own historians, and I cannot hope to give a more comprehensive sweep of the Indian women's movement to solve its problems than have the 30 women leaders all of Indian birth in Kitabistan's [publishers] former informative publication "Our Cause," edited by Shyam Kumari Nehru.⁶⁵

By portraying herself modestly as a passive "witness" Cousins discounts her own history as a formidable active player in the Indian woman's movement, thereby significantly distorting the history of the Indian women's movement for fear of treading on the toes of Indian nationalist sensitivities about western feminist cultural imperialism. However, in a somewhat roundabout way Cousins still doggedly included an approving evaluation of the role of internationalism in Indian women's movements, in a chapter on "Indian Women and Internationalism." Cousins was at pains to point out how on various levels international interchange was in fact a two way process which had benefited Indian womanhood; how it was an Indian woman for example who, by lecturing on Vedic philosophy in Dublin in 1907, had attracted her to Vedic ideals; and how

⁶⁵Ibid., 8.

American feminist Mrs Carrie Chapman Catt had sent a donation of ten dollars for five years to Cousins's early suffrage drive: "In the account books of destiny it will balance the disservice done by the exaggerations of Miss Katherine Mayo's book "Mother India." Thus Cousins gently attempted to break down the assumption of internationalism as an automatically one-sided act of cultural imperialism.

Cousins also apparently felt insecure enough to remind readers of her training in Irish historiography - an education which she felt had left her: "peculiarly well equipped to attune myself with the condition of India which I found to be a political and social parallel but three hundred fold magnified, to the Ireland of a hundred years ago... it was easy for me to evaluate strong and weak points in present day contemporary Indian civilization."⁶⁶ In her over compensatory efforts to reassure Indians of how just exactly like theirs was her own nationalization, she repeats unconsciously some of the "advanced to backward" tones of address used by such as Eleanor Rathbone.

Earlier in 1935 she had applauded the maturity of Indian women for inviting her to preside over a womens' conference in Mysore, informing them in the opening of her speech how their tolerance revealed their sophistication as internationalist diplomats:

⁶⁶Ibid., 10.

I deeply appreciate the honour that you have done me by inviting me to preside over your important deliberations. That you should wish to have me, an Irish woman from Madras, shows that you have overleapt not only the barriers of your State but of your nation. It proves you to be internationally minded. Nay, more, it is evidence of the indivisibility of womanhood and of the fact that the disabilities and the problems of women are the same the world over.⁶⁷

In 1941 she would also write of her Irishness somewhat defensively:

Being Irish in India neither as a christian missionary, nor as a British Government servant, nor for any political propaganda, and having already studied and gained much from India in philosophies - Vedic, Buddhist and Islamic - it was easy for me to evaluate strong and weak points in present day contemporary Indian civilization....to mingle freely with Indian men, women, rich, poor, Hindu, Muslim, Parsee, Christian, to give and take freely what my husband or I have to exchange of viewpoints, knowledge, service. Such a varied life has given us a wealth of friendship and experiences as rarely falls to westerners in this land.⁶⁸

And in testimony of her personal disinterest in political hierarchy she pleaded that she never felt any "sense of separation between her self and others." This insistence on the glorious ease of her social intimacy is interesting in view of her total repulsion at the idea of sexual intimacy.

⁶⁷Cousins, "Presidential Address to Ninth Session of Mysore State Womens' Conference," Stri Dharma 18:3 (January 1935):104.

⁶⁸Cousins, Indian Womanhood Today, 10.

For a person who was later to travel round the world I had the lucky heritage from my Father and grandmother of being at home with anybody anywhere, from royalty to scavenger, from duchess to dustman. How many times I've got myself out of difficulty by a smile or a bit of Irish blarney! I have never felt any sense of separation between myself and others. I am fundamentally aware of our equal human-ness.⁶⁹

Cousins's universalist philosophy of "equal human-ness," could also however be criticized for a blindness or petulant disregard for deep and historically constructed cultural diversities. A similar conundrum in this "all for one and one for all" perspective was manifested at the institutional level in the AIWC's nationalizing conception of all Indian women. As a matter of nationalist course the umbrella organization tended to marginalize minority groups such as Muslim women and women involved in the Tamil non-Brahman movement, to mention but two. And while Cousins honored Indian women's refusal to co-operate with international feminist bodies in certain instances, clearly she did not agree with it. To Margaret Sanger for instance she wrote in 1935: "I do think emphasis on the American angle of your visit to the Conference should be made and the English angle be kept in abeyance. I dislike having to write this as sisterhood is greater than national differences."⁷⁰ Cousins was also clearly aware of how

⁶⁹Cousins and Cousins, 53.

⁷⁰Cousins to Sanger, 27 August 1935, Sanger Collection, LC, Vol 25, Reel 17.

politically incorrect was her universalist cultural reductionism in 1942 and how Indians wanted to be viewed only within the specifics of their own culture rather than being measured or compared against others, which was Cousins's penchant:

In seeking to follow up the kind of future developments of Indian womanhood I must keep strictly to outstanding characteristics of India and not let it get mixed up with the development of women of other countries whose climatical, historical, numerical, educational, religious and economical factors are utterly different from those of India.⁷¹

Records of Cousins's writings and activities are noticeably scarce for the period from 1937 to 1942 except for her constantly vigilant intervention in attempts to save AIWC branches from going under. By December of 1942 for instance the heavily government - influenced Madras constituency of the AIWC had three resignations owing to their sense that the AIWC was "drifting rapidly into party politics."⁷² In Trivandrum also the Dewan was supporting the NCWI to take over the AIWC branch as the AIWC was getting a name for party politics. It was still Cousins, an old Trivandrum hand, who tried to manage the situation so that both groups could coexist through the

⁷¹Cousins, Indian Womanhood Today, 176.

⁷²Cousins to Mehta, 30 December 1942, AIWC Papers, Roll 19 File 10.

tensions of wartime.⁷³ Cousins was constantly trying to hold the AIWC together from undercover and hold it in universal framework and show its support for the Indian national cause without alienating too many government members and getting the AIWC banned outright. Her basic priority was to "keep the Congress flag flying" as she put it.

In November 1942 Cousins wrote to Paul of how prohibitory orders against the holding of any meetings had stopped the annual meeting of the Conference that year: "You remember how the WSPU (Suffragettes) went to pieces during the war and never recovered. I fear the same again under other skies."⁷⁴ A month earlier Cousins had insisted that there was no reason to suspend AIWC meetings as she had attended a Gandhi Jyanta [birthday] meeting of her sub branch in Mysore which passed off without any interference. "I spoke at it and sold Khadi there! Conditions of work are so different in

⁷³Cousins wrote to Mehta of how "There is suppressed dissatisfaction at the high handed way the attempt is being made to turn over the whole membership of the AIWC to the NCWI, but the women are not in a position, or ripe enough, to stand out against forces which do not come into the open but force the position interiorly...Try and keep the link prolonged so that the two societies may still exist here. The NCW also will not live long or do much except in the first year and in less war tension time the AIWC can revive again here." Cousins to Mehta, 6 January 1942, AIWC Papers, Roll 17 File 12. And again she wrote to Mehta, "You are very wise and helpful to send me copies of the correspondence - for the women here do not show it to me ! They are so afraid of the Tip-tops that they play a double game." Cousins to Mehta, 21 January 1942. AIWC Papers, Roll 17 File 12.

⁷⁴Cousins to Paul, 7 November 1942, World Woman's Party Papers, LC, Reel 174.

different places that on no account should we make a rule to suspend the AIWC activity."⁷⁵ On 10 November Cousins complained of the increasing dichotomy between those who were prepared to go to jail and those who were not:

The prohibition of meetings order can be got over if we make requests to the right authorities showing our aims and objects. At least we should try. What bothers me is that our women take any excuse to do nothing unless they are prepared to go to jail. Every degree of self-expression is valuable in a cause. ...Excuse this rather moidered note. I see red as I think of our political being denied interviews. We don't know who is in prison or where. It is a refinement of cruelty.⁷⁶

Yet at the end of August 1942 Cousins chided the AIWC leadership for issuing a statement entitled "an appeal from the women of India" which called, rather too shrilly for her liking apparently, for an end to violence; for a release of Congress leaders; and for England to transfer power to Indians. While Cousins worried that such a statement which had been issued by eleven women on behalf of the AIWC might endanger the whole legality of the AIWC, she also re-established her own nationalist position:

I speak all the more strongly as above because

⁷⁵Cousins to Mehta, 10 October 1942, AIWC Papers, Roll 11, File 16.

⁷⁶Cousins to Mehta, 10 November 1942, AIWC Papers, Roll 11, File 17.

personally I am full of protest and am willing personally to suffer the consequences, but we have our honour to keep as regards the many members of the Conference whom none of us should not draw into danger, nor should we endanger the legality of the whole Assoc.⁷⁷

One month later the following statement of James and Margaret Cousins was published widely in the press and Cousins took particular care to ask the AIWC executive if they had seen it, and sent them a copy of it. It was obviously very important to her at this point, for whatever reason, that her strong nationalist feeling be registered with them.

During the twenty-seven years since we came from Ireland and settled in India we have been aware of kindness and good will between the people of India and Western people. As years have passed, however, there has been a remarkably rapid growth in self-conscious patriotism and in assurance of ability of the people of India to take their government into their own hands, and today their major preoccupation is the freeing of themselves from a form of government, which, with the best will in the world, cannot be other than foreign to the realities of their lives.⁷⁸

And the Cousinses continue by asking that Britain do now what it had promised to do later - that is, transfer power to

⁷⁷"That statement was issued by 11 conference members as a personal protest on a state of affairs connected with a policy of one political party and as such is definitely party politics with which members may definitely identify themselves, but not our non-party association." Cousins to Mehta, 27 August 1942, AIWC Papers, Roll 17 File 16.

⁷⁸James and Margaret Cousins, "Statement to the Press," AIWC Papers, Rol 17, File 54.

Indians.

It was also earlier in March of 1942 that Cousins wrote to Alice Paul of the U.S. National Women's Party on the occasion of Madame Chiang of China's visit to India about Paul's suggestion of having an Asian committee of the World Women's Party. Cousins told Paul of how "Indian national consciousness is much more touchy about non-Asians like myself taking any initiative or prominent part in Indian progressive movements. So I just suggest, but if Rani Rajwade [then still secretary of the suspended All Asia Women's Conference] does not rise to the matter I will start from another base." While Cousins agreed with Paul's idea she said "I will try and get it moving, but I have not the same power to do so openly as I had at the time of the All-Asian Conference. It is an inevitable result of the growth of self-reliance and I honour it."⁷⁹

The fact that Cousins was now forced to go about organizing an Asian women's lobby for a women's world party in a covert manner reaches to the heart of the problem of universalism and nationalism. In the same letter to Paul, Cousins complained of how Indian women would have nothing to do with the signing of an Atlantic Charter of women's rights "specifically because it had held India in status quo". India was in 1942, as she pointed out, facing its biggest crisis in

⁷⁹Cousins to Alice Paul, 17 March 1942, National Women's Party Papers 1913-1974, Film 10351, Series VII World Women's Party Papers, 1938-1958, Reel 174.

terms of its future as a nation and that crisis forced outsiders like Cousins into keeping a low profile. "I constantly find that I look at things much more from a world standpoint, or from the angle of a world womanhood or of a universal religion or a one God than my Indian or English sisters do. You must jump to the reasons why." "The reasons why" was in reference to Cousins's appreciation of Paul's similar die-hard universalist spiritual feminist sensibility. Cousins admired Paul greatly and liked to think that Paul was cut from the same spiritual cloth as herself.⁸⁰ Cousins's stubborn character as a stickler for inclusivist language in all constitutional points cropped up again as as she kept a careful watch on newspaper reports from her retirement hill station home in Kotagiri: "We women need to be very alert in details and let nothing pass which is the least bit ambiguous or general as far as we are concerned."⁸¹ Cousins was eternally anxious that women's responses to any constitutional proposal should not be taken for granted, and that the historical record should reflect the women's disgust and awareness of their raw deal, even if they were being for the moment ignored - as she had put it as early as 1931: "Eternal Vigilance is the watch-dog of freedom."⁸² In April of 1942 Cousins wrote to

⁸⁰Cousins, "Some American Women Leaders," Stri Dharma 10:8 (July 1930):24.

⁸¹Cousins to Mehta, 1 April 1942, AIWC Papers, Roll 16, File 273.

⁸²Cousins, Stri Dharma 14:6 (April 1931):230.

Urmila Mehta, AIWC secretary, suggesting that she felt that the AIWC was losing its nerve and focus in terms of its intervention in constitution framing:

I am on tenterhooks these days because I feel it is necessary that some leading Indian women should speak for womanhood to Cripps. If it were considered too much a party matter even then some representative women should go without using the Women's Conf. name...I've written wires to Asaf Ali, Mrs Nehru, R. Rajwade...I hope some women will be brave enough to see him and not let womanhood go by default. But when our Conf. has passed the resolution in favour of India's freedom it should also in my opinion have put those resolutions on that subject in Cripp's hands, no matter what the final decision on his "proposal" may be.⁸³

Four months later Cousins again wrote to Mehta of how:

It seemed to me retrogression that no woman or body of women protested against Cripps' reply to the Muslim League (dated April 2) which stated "If the majority for accession to the Union is less than 60% the minority will have the right to demand a plebiscite of the adult male population." (Itals. mine) Alas! Though the British proposal is dropped these words will continue to be used as a precedent - and we women were dumb.⁸⁴

An AIWC resolution was moved finally at the AIWC half-yearly meeting by Cousins's apparently ever loyal resolution mover, Rajwade, after which however the whole idea of the need of the AIWC to object to the Cripps' mission was discounted by the

⁸³ Cousins to Mehta, 1 April 1942, AIWC Papers, Roll 16, File 273.

⁸⁴ Cousins to Urmila Mehta, 4 August 1942, AIWC Papers, Roll 16, File 273.

standing committee on the basis that the Cripps' mission was rejected by everyone, and therefore it was deemed "not necessary to do anything in the matter." Mehta however replied in no uncertain terms to Mrs Corbett Ashby of the Women's Advisory Council on Indian Affairs in England, who must also have registered something of a vote of no confidence in the AIWC's handling of the Cripps' mission, saying how "while the Cripps' mission remains only in memory, we can assure you that India's womanhood today is conscious enough to be able to assert their rights in any new Constitution in spite of the reactionary attention of Sir Stafford and his mission."⁸⁵

Cousins interpreted the failure of the Cripps' mission to offer full independence as something far more meaningful than just another mark of imperial stubbornness, as many of her AIWC colleagues saw it. She saw in it nothing less than a sign of the reverse of civilization. At the Abrama Women Workers' Training Camp in July of 1942 Cousins made a harrowingly spiritually charged political speech in which she lamented how even a man such as Sir Stafford Cripps, who was known for his "Catholic and human outlook," could be bent by "the corrosive power of imperialism." Cousins felt that the failure of the mission had "irrevocably blasted the moral sanction that alone can make their [British] victory of value to the world." She saw the mission as a fundamental betrayal of the cause of

⁸⁵ Mehta to Mrs Corbett Ashby, Women's Advisory Council on Indian Affairs, 17 July 1942, AIWC Papers, Roll 16, File 275.

peace and she was depressed to find the world in a state of "holocaust" with Burmese refugees wandering homelessly - "uncared for and unwanted"; with molested women as more "tragic bye-products" of a warring world. "Civilization" Cousins assessed "is in the reverse gear and today, as in the dawn of human history, only an enlightened co-operative life has a chance of survival."⁸⁶

By 1942 therefore Cousins was still as certain of the idea of an enlightened co-operative life as the only approach to modern problems as she had been at the dawn of her own history as an activist. Cousins hoped the AIWC would be at the world helm of that "enlightened co-operative" life. She also finished her swansong book on the state of Indian womanhood in 1941 with the fervent hope that Indian woman's spirituality will be released to the West through the example of Gandhian activism - that India would "become the headquarters of this new spiritual world order which will place love of one's kind higher than love of self, or blood relationship, or nationality."⁸⁷ Exactly how she meant "one's kind" is unusually cryptic here, but she most likely meant women. Throughout her suffragist days Cousins commented on how deeply moved she was by the idea that women were fighting for their own sex. This sense of women's brave loyalty to each other particularly

⁸⁶Cousins's speech at Abrama Conference, July 1942, AIWC Papers, Roll 16, File 277.

⁸⁷Cousins, Indian Womanhood Today, 187.

captured her imagination.

Yet by 1942 it was very clear to Cousins that what she termed Indians' brittle "self-consciousness" regarding foreign interference, was sounding the death knell of her career in India as an activist, Irish or not: "although I longed to be in the struggle against such foreign imbecility I had the feeling that participation by me was no longer required, or even desired, by the leaders of Indian womanhood who were now coming to the front."⁸⁸

In 1943 Cousins suffered the first of several strokes which led to chronic paralysis and loss of speech, necessitating her retirement from public affairs. Over the succeeding eleven long years until her death in 1954 at Adyar, Cousins was frequently hospitalized, as well as nursed by kind friends, paid help, and her husband. Her old colleagues from Madras visited her during her stays inland again in Kotagiri and Madanapalle, although she barely recognized them, and finally she spent her last years back again at Adyar where she was looked after by some help provided in stretches by Muthulakshmi Reddy, and by her husband, who suffered the terrible frustration of nursing a stroke victim, and especially a patient of Margaret Cousins's heavy physical weight. As the Cousinses were characteristically low on funds now, after independence Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru awarded Margaret Cousins an annual bursary of several thousand

⁸⁸Cousins and Cousins, 740.

rupees in recognition of her work for the Indian nation, as did the Madras government. Several friends around Madras also contributed various very substantial purses to the Cousinses during these hard financial times including a purse to commemorate their golden wedding anniversary in 1953.⁸⁹ Margaret Cousins died on 4 March 1954 at Adyar, and after cremation her ashes were brought by Theosophist Mr Bhagwan Das to be spread on the Ganges at Benares. The AIWC named their research library and archive in her honor at their permanent headquarters in Delhi, where a suitably Indianized and feminized portrait of her sporting an unusual long flowing mane of hair is included amongst the portrait gallery of the leading lights of the conference.

In 1956 Muthulakshmi Reddy compiled a collection of Cousins's letters as a document of her friend's contribution to the women's cause entitled Mrs Margaret Cousins and her Work for India, by One WHO Knows. The secretary of the Theosophical Society, Elithe Nisewanger, at this stage washed Theosophical hands of the responsibility of commemorating Margaret Cousins further as he felt that such a book would be interesting from an Indian historical standpoint and the burden should therefore rightfully fall upon India and the

⁸⁹Reddy to Sri Ram, 9 April 1953 and Reddy to Elithe Nisewanger, 31 March 1953, Margaret Cousins File, Theosophical Society Archives, Adyar.

women's associations.⁹⁰ Reddy however felt she had already collected enough from her circle to meet the nursing charges during Cousins's illness and was therefore finding it difficult to collect money again to publish the commemorative volume of letters, and thought the Theosophical Society could help, which was an understandable hope especially in view of the fact that the Theosophical Society ran a Theosophical Publishing House, where Cousins had in fact first served on her arrival in India.⁹¹ The Theosophical Society's Vasanta Press in the end printed the volume while positively refusing to reduce the price in response to Reddy's complaint about its several errata, for which the Theosophical treasurer promptly retorted that the press was not responsible.⁹² Reddy also published various short sketches of Cousins's life which were aimed towards the appeal for a fund to build a hall in Cousins's name for the holding of meetings and public function in central Madras, a plan which has not yet materialized.⁹³ In November 1978 on the centenary of Margaret Cousins's birth an

⁹⁰Elithe Nisewanger to "Em," 18 April 1956, Margaret Cousins's File, Theosophical Archives, Adyar.

⁹¹Reddy to Sri Ram, President of Theosophical Society, 17 April 1956, Margaret Cousins's file, Theosophical Archives, Adyar.

⁹²E.N. Lord., (Honorary Treasurer of the Theosophical Society) to Reddy, 15 March 1957, Margaret Cousins file, Theosophical Archives, Adyar.

⁹³Many of these sketches can be found in Theosophical Society Archives, Adyar and were elaborated and compiled by Reddy in Mrs Margaret Cousins and her Work in India: Compiled by One Who Knows (Madras, 1956).

exhibition of the "exquisite art objects" from the Cousinses' personal art collection was mounted at a hotel art gallery in Egmore, Madras, organized by Rukmini Devi of the Kalakshetra school of arts, crafts and dance, which had been founded originally by James Cousins and colleagues in 1925. The Hindu remarked in buoyant 1970s parlance that the Cousinses were a couple who "helped Indians to rediscover their soul and artistic heritage." The Women's Indian Association also took advantage of the centenary year to publicize its ongoing program which included plans to extend adult education in the city's slums.⁹⁴ Another Hindu article recalled how the Indian national anthem, "Jana Gana Mana" by Bengali poet, Rabindranath Tagore, was first written down by Margaret Cousins at a school function in Madanapalle, and the issuing of a postal stamp in her honor was suggested.⁹⁵ James Cousins died two years after his wife's death at the Mission Hospital back in Madanapalle. It is interesting that it was Margaret Cousins's memory, rather than that of her husband, which has received the most attention and affection in India, both at the time of their respective deaths and in the centenary celebrations. Sankara Menon, current head of the Kalakshetra, also remembers Margaret Cousins's personality as the finer of the pair. Perhaps the most monumental commemorative document

⁹⁴"Birth Centenary of WIA Founder", Hindu, 5 November 1978.

⁹⁵"National Anthem First Written Down by Mrs Cousins," Hindu, 28 November 1978.

of the Cousinses' lives is Alan Denson's 1967 self-published master bio-bibliographical survey of the Cousinses' family genealogy, social connections and records.⁹⁶ In Ireland James Cousins's centenary in 1973 went barely remembered by fellow northern Irish poet John Hewitt. Hewitt acknowledged that few in Ireland would remember Cousins "although his name is something of a legend in another continent." Hewitt described James Cousins's memory in Ireland as one which now "pads gently among the footnotes to Irish literature and the history of India's emergence."⁹⁷ In September 1994 a plaque in honor of Margaret Cousins was unveiled at a ceremony attended by the President of Ireland, Mary Robinson, and by the President of the AIWC, Shobha Ranade, at Cousins's home place in Boyle.

⁹⁶Alan Denson, James H. Cousins (1873-1956) and Margaret E. Cousins (1878-1954): A Bio-Bibliographical Survey (Kendal, Westmorland, England: Author, 1967).

⁹⁷John Hewitt, Irish Press, 21 July 1973.

CONCLUSIONS

Because Cousins's experience of the twentieth century cuts across so much, temporally, spatially and culturally, there are multiple possible frameworks of analysis. The following concluding comments outline only some of the major ones. It is useful to discuss Cousins's Irish and Indian periods separately before drawing some general conclusions and identifying consistent themes.

Certain issues in Cousins's Irish feminist practice appear to be self-contradictory. These are first her resolution of a pacifist ideology with a militant practice; second her response to the challenge about the "masculinism" of militance, third her perspective on class issues; and finally her idea of militant suffragism as an unofficial service to an equally unofficial and imaginary Irish state.

Ardent Irish suffragist and socialist Louie Bennett's wry comment on how she was "very curious to know by what train of reasoning militant suffragists arrive at the state of becoming peace advocates" raises the problem of the interplay of medium and message. What Bennett may have been missing is the Christianlike self-sacrificing turn in which Cousins and many militants cast their militance. Militant suffragists

distinguished militance from militarism by declaring that while militarism damaged people, militance damaged only things. Thus for Cousins the means and the end were one in that while her militant style courted and provoked near violent situations, those situations could only hurt "things," and of course, the militants themselves. This self-sacrifice was designed to demonstrate the strength of the militants' conviction; their actual victimization in daily life; and their womanly dedication to pacifism. The manner in which Cousins performed her militant acts - her organizing of marches; her reasonable co-operation in going calmly and willingly to jail; her hunger striking - these were all deliberately modelled on a type of epic Christian martyrdom in which Cousins accentuated a "feminine" stoicism. Interestingly Cousins also reversed the charges of militancy against the "brutal and bullying" government for its "coercive militancy" of northern Irish unionists:

The passive resistance of such heroic and self-sacrificing woman is the only force that will beat the coercive militancy of a brutal and bullying government. Ulster defies it with threats of civil slaughter; we women defy it by daring it to kill us all out. Its only choice lies between votes for women or death for women.¹

Cousins's reference to Ulster unionists as fellow victims of

¹Cousins, "Impressions of the 'Cat' in Action," Irish Citizen 25 October 1913.

the bullying government indicates the non-sectarian breadth of her thinking on the nationalist/unionist question and also however how she scapegoated the British government as the spiritual cause of everyone's ills. As well as being a commonplace of militant suffragist rhetoric, Cousins's characterization of the government as a devilish bully was quite sincere. The passionate spiritual intensity of Cousins's conviction in the moral rectitude of suffragist militance is also apparent from her choice of title for a pamphlet issued through the IWFL which she wrote in 1913 called Holy War. While the document has been lost, it is described in IWFL records as "an admirable defence of militancy by Mrs Cousins."² It is clear therefore that Cousins, far from being conflicted on the issue of the violent-seeming nature of militance, conceived of it rather as her spiritual vocation.

Then there is Cousins's defence of militancy against the popular charges that the militants were "unsexed females" or merely aping masculinity. Some historians have contended that the issue of suffragist militance was in general a subconsciously "male-identified" attempt to penetrate, occupy, and in Cousins's terms perhaps to "spring clean" the public space.³ And indeed Cousins's deliberate justification of

²IWFL Annual Report, 1912.

³Brian Harrison, "The Act of Militancy, Violence and the Suffragettes, 1904-1914," In Peacable Kingdom, Stability and Change in Modern Britain (Oxford: Clarendon, 1982).

militance as a crucial stage of evolutionary progress in its balancing of the masculine and feminine virtues in each woman could be invoked as damning evidence of the militants' efforts in the "emasculatation" of women.

Only by militant action (it may be constitutional or non-constitutional) can we succeed in balancing the feminine and masculine virtues in each woman. In doing this, we are winning triumphs for the forces of human evolution.⁴

However Cousins turned the argument on its head by implying that men had for too long unnaturally controlled the public domain of the feminine such as human welfare, and the suffragists were therefore merely trying to recover woman's natural and sovereign sphere of interest. In line with her theory of the dual sexed nature of the individual as articulated in the "femaculine," Cousins felt that she was in fact righting the balance of gender:

The common impression was that they wanted to be more like men. What they really wanted was to be more woman-like than they had been. The women's point of view was the welfare of the human life. Men were more interested in the financial side.⁵

The masculinity which Cousins aspired to incorporate however

⁴Cousins, Irish Citizen 12 February 1912.

⁵Cousins, Leinster Leader, 18 April 1913.

was an ideally reformed masculinity rather more reminiscent of medieval male aristocratic chivalric codes of honor than the actual "historical ways of men" which she found so base. For example she blamed the ignoble bullying tactics of the government for wearing down the "high-minded" resistance of the militants until they were "compelled to follow the historical ways of men and take to actions that were unnatural and repugnant to them..."⁶

It is precisely because Cousins invoked a lost tradition of intersexual chivalric nobility that her feminist vision was inherently and potentially oppressive to both sexes. Cousins's ideological framework was particularly dangerous because she was convinced that she was challenging outdated rigid lines of sexual definition even as she redefined sexual difference in more strict terms.

The third point of criticism is Cousins's feminist conception of class dynamics and the nation:

Political imprisonment was well understood in Ireland, and imprisonment did more than anything else to forward the cause here. It was not the amount of the damage done it was the fact of high-minded women being in prison that was valuable.⁷

⁶Ibid., 194.

⁷Cousins, Irish Citizen 24 May 1913.

What I want to highlight here is Cousins's nuanced emphasis that

public opinion was shocked - not by the mere fact that women were jailed - but rather it was shocked because of the particular social, intellectual and moral calibre of the types of women who were jailed. A deep felt appreciation of a certain self-sacrificing impulse on the part of the genteel, educated type of suffragist informs much of Cousins's writing on the period. Cousins tended to make close friendships with women who shared her refined artistic and philosophical interests and who upheld what she called the "dignity" of womanhood while fighting for their human rights. For example, her Fellow Theosophist, Mrs Charlotte Despard, was a particular favorite of Cousins's. In Cousins's description she was:

an aristocrat who was the most democratic of the political thinkers amongst us... She was a warrior - and a pacifist. Her type of mind appealed to me most of any of the suffrage leaders.⁸

It is this sense of aristocratic women who were consciously divesting themselves of class consciousness in their articulation of democracy which Cousins here underlines. Throughout her writing on suffrage Cousins makes a special point of applauding what she repeatedly underlines as that

⁸Cousins and Cousins, 80.

"nobility" which pricked the conscience of generous social reformers. And yet the notion of a wilful and courageous sacrificing of class privilege was at least partially associated with traditional notions of class obligation and patronage, if even in the interests of democracy. When Cousins expressed her gratification at witnessing such generous gestures of "nobility" at work, it was always, of course, on the part of upper-class well-educated women.

Cousins was always pleased to remark on how the suffragist movement rewarded women with an expansive sense of transcending class barriers. One of the blessings which the IWFL avowedly brought Cousins was:

a widening of contacts with our kind of all degrees, a greater understanding of the difficulties of social living, an enlarged experience of the inequalities of opportunity imposed on women, an increasing sense of protest against the injustices under which women lived, most of all the women of the working classes.⁹

Most likely here it was upper class women who most valued this "enlarged experience" of class inequality. Whereas Cousins tended to individualize upper class women because she had deeper personal relations with them and could relate to their backgrounds more easily, the fact is that she had few working class friends. Cousins rarely if ever made any mention of the financial means of any of her (usually highly placed) friends,

⁹Ibid., 166.

and while she was never very financially secure herself, apparently neither did she have the need to find economic differences very interesting much less incorporate class difference as an explicit part of her feminist ideology. It was Cousins's view that such "noble" women risked alienation from their social circles and families through their involvement in "unseemly" and "unladylike" politics. In one sense however women of such classes had less to lose than most because they were already well financially established and could most likely fall back on family support at the end of the day. Another perspective which could be taken on this is that suffragism was something to occupy the talent, education and sense of modern energy now within the reach of relatively wealthy women, a state of affairs which contrasted acutely with the limitations on working class women who had more pressing, practical everyday concerns.

While Cousins was indeed aware of the extent to which class affected women's power, as is evident for example from her retort to an anti-suffragist statement in the Irish Times by Bishop O'Dwyer of Limerick, where Cousins pointed out that not all women were represented by men - that widows and some women found it necessary to support themselves - Cousins followed the thinking of the majority of her colleagues who supported the property qualification of "equal" suffrage, thereby, for the moment at least, complying with the status

quo.¹⁰ Cousins's thinking on this issue was naturally shaped by the cultural and social context of the IWFL. Cousins's claim that the IWFL was constituted by a very "mixed lot" was only partly true. Following the general profile of most of the Irish suffragist groups, the IWFL was dominated by well-educated, upper middle class women, a significant share of whom were Protestant. The IWFL attracted a more vibrant, intellectual, youthful, active type than the more strictly constitutional organizations such as the IWSLGA which had preceded it. The Sheehy Skeffingtons for instance both had advanced graduate degrees, while another prominent member, Mary Hayden, was the first woman professor of Irish history at Trinity College. The class backgrounds of many IWFL members were therefore relatively privileged. Although the IWFL members were acutely conscious of class inequalities they did not during Cousins's time actively involve themselves in class related issues. However subtle, sensitive and sympathetic were her inter-class relations, Cousins was ultimately, and perhaps inevitably, speaking about working class women as a class, and one decidedly apart from her own. So that while Cousins was careful to be democratically inclusive in her rhetoric, she always gave priority to the question of sex over class. Given her alleged reading in socialism and her acquaintance with Irish socialist leader James Connolly, George Bernard Shaw and

¹⁰Cousins, Irish Times 20 February, 1912.

some English Fabians, it is interesting that the issue of class inequality should occupy Cousins so slightly. Cliona Murphy points out that it might have required a large political and possibly intellectual leap for women of Cousins's class to take up issues of class more actively. Cousins however was well trained in the grand intellectual leaps which Theosophy often demanded.¹¹

It may very well have been however the very largeness of Cousins's Theosophical vision of inevitable global progress which facilitated her complacency on the natural evolution of the social Brotherhood. Although the explicit primary object of the Theosophical Society was "to form a nucleus of the Universal Brotherhood of Humanity without distinction of race, creed, sex, caste or colour," the Theosophical idea of unity in diversity implicitly justified social hierarchy on the basis of the natural historical evolution of the species, an idea derived from Spencerian evolutionary thinking. Many Theosophists also embraced the Hindu philosophy of karma which tended to encourage complacency about social and economic inequality. While this Spencerian view of evolution was, like the Hindu ideology of karma, theoretically optional for Theosophists, both ideas maintained strong currency among them. Finally, Cousins discounted class issues in favor of an almost exclusive focus

¹¹Murphy, Irish Suffrage Movement, 72.

on correcting sexual politics - because she interpreted the energy generated by the suffragist cause as a sign that it was the cause most appropriate for the times.

Finally, how did Cousins relate to the idea of nation? Cousins also repeatedly legitimized her imprisonment as a traditional Irish strategy of resistance; "Political imprisonment was well understood in Ireland."¹² While such claims were of course partly designed to win the support of those sympathetic to "the nationalist tradition" Cousins also formulated her suffragism as a vital corrective to nationalist ideology: if women constituted roughly half the population of the emerging state then true freedom could only exist if women were included in the franchise. Furthermore Cousins believed that women had a particular role to play in government. Here again the idea of woman's function as the "noble" and enlightened conscience of society figured in her belief that it was woman's responsibility to supervise the welfare of the state. Cousins privileged woman as a potential savior, as one who, once given the chance to govern would be free of corruption and totally committed to the public good. She put it plainly in her newspaper reply to Bishop O'Dwyer: "If politics are so bad and corrupt as the Bishops think them, then the sooner the women who have the public welfare at heart

¹²Cousins, Irish Citizen 24 May 1913.

get an entry to them and start a spring cleaning the better."¹³ Cousins used this rhetoric at suffragist rallies in her invocation of the notion of "Mother Ireland" and of the "world famous qualities of Irish womanhood" to convince the crowd of how woman's hand could right the nation.

In our suffrage organization that aims at the spring-cleaning of our Irish national home, we have just now to get especially to work...this Daffodil fete will give us a splendid opportunity of showing the public that we have not lost our power of providing enjoyment and entertainment along the lines that are universally acknowledged to be our sphere.

Further, to prove that the Franchise League members are not "unsexed females" the tea stalls and home-made cake and sweet stalls will display the cooking gifts of suffragettes. As women are the caterers and cooks of the race, it is a scandal that they have no power to regulate laws dealing with the country's food and drink supplies. The very fact that we "feed the brute" so well, even with inferior and often adulterated food materials, is an added argument why we should be given votes, so as to be able to insist on purer supplies for the future, and to express our view upon food taxes.¹⁴

To the extent that Cousins gave any thought to questions of the quality of life in her vision of "the national home," whatever her views on its ideal geographical or constitutional definition, she had a more thoughtful perspective than many of her co-nationalists. Cousins's thinking on the idea of the

¹³Cousins, Irish Times 20 February 1912.

¹⁴Cousins, "Past and Present," Irish Citizen 14 March 1914.

nation however was still rather inchoate. For Cousins, the question of nationalism, like that of class, was secondary. Cousins may well have envisaged the new nation within a range of relative independence - as much for instance in terms of a type of commonwealth status as in terms of a republic. Her idea of woman as the motherly savior figure of the nation also extended to a global vision. She genuinely believed and justified her claims for an enlargement of women's power in terms of service both to the nation and to the course of human evolution rather than purely in terms of the rights of the individual citizen to the nation.

Cousins was not alone in using the feminist argument of the rights of the individual to serve the ideal of a separate spheres feminism and vice versa. Cousins's limitations can be accounted for by the limitations posited in her ideological and cultural universe. Despite the explicitly liberal, democratic manifesto of the IWFL, much of its rhetoric replicated the strain of feminist ideology common in British, continental European and North American suffragisms which argued that women had, by definition, a special brief for the administration of the public welfare.

Similarly Cousins could not have escaped saturation by the idea of "woman" as constituted and processed in turn-of-the-century cultural nationalist circles outside of the IWFL. As mentioned before the Cousinses' fellow cultural nationalist reformers of the literary and theosophical movements

subscribed to a romanticized fixed notion of Irish cultural tradition, which was often symbolized by an ideal of Irish womanhood. Such cultural nationalists frequently feminized the nation as a woman whose day was always on the point of return in the independent Ireland of the new age, a vision as we have seen in which Cousins ultimately shared. The only apparent difference between Cousins's vision and theirs was that she seemed serious about actually implementing it and thus posed a real threat to those who merely paid lip-service to it.

Notwithstanding Cousins's theoretical agreement with many of the arguments of the opposition as to woman's place being in the home, Cousins however appropriated and used that rhetoric by expanding the notion of the home to the national sphere. Did Cousins's belief, however, in the ideology of separate spheres stop there? Or was she merely negotiating a median way between placating the worries of nationalists and custodians of the moral welfare of the nation against the more extreme caricatures of the sensationalist hungry press as a clever strategic move to open doors to limitless possibilities of freedom for self-definition and power? Or, was she as an artful bricoleur, patching Christian notions of egalitarianism and medieval notions of aristocratic chivalry together depending on what and who she was arguing against? Yet another possibility is that Cousins had a different agenda of human rights and power "up her sleeve" which was overwhelmed and "lost" in press records which sold suffragism as an amusing

form of social deviance. There are no private letters, sensitive and thoughtful tracts or manifestos, because these were not interesting or threatening news at the time. In the evidence therefore there is no distinction to be drawn between Cousins's reflective rhetorical use of such ideas and her sincere complicity with them. However it is possible that her ideology was actually defined in combat against arguments of the anti-suffragists. As she responded to the antis, for example, that she was simply extending woman's sphere to its naturally sovereign domain, she was choosing a path of least resistance by which she often accommodated and incorporated opponents' conservative sexual ideology against itself. Cousins was adept at retorting to opponents' superficially in their own terms even if only to expose the ludicrous nature of their arguments as she saw them. For example, Cousins's justification of her militance as a noble high-minded Irishwoman was a rhetorical strategy to remind the opposition that she was merely seeking to realize their traditional ideal of gender rather than seeking to destroy it. Thus proving that they were the ones who needed to practice what they were preaching, and that if they could use essentialism as a way to keep women at home she could also use it as a way to get women out of the home. Cousins's rhetorical weaponry was thus partially shaped, doily-like, by the contours of what she perceived as the ideological loop holes of the "antis."

The question remains then if Cousins was deliberately,

consciously rethinking gender roles in "their" terms or did she genuinely believe in them? How far beyond "common knowledge" was Cousins allowed to think? What evidence do we have that Cousins had any consciousness of Audre Lorde's dilemma about how one cannot dismantle the house of the master using the master's tools? It did not really matter what ideology the anti-suffragists threw out as she had an automatic knack of marshalling all her political philosophy against it anyway, such was the flexibility of her "truth." She just dealt with whatever came and the end justified the means as well as the means the end. One can only conclude therefore that Cousins's use and belief in fundamentalist conservative sexual thinking about women's essentially different identity from men was cannily strategic as well as uncannily sincere. Given the contours of the evidence then what calls for further investigation is not the question of why she was not more "radical," or more far-sighted, but rather what broader ideologies deliberately confined and defined her vision at various moments.

Of these in Ireland, cultural nationalist ideology was primary to Cousins's emergence as a self-conscious feminist. While various scholars have noted the complex and unstable ways in which Ireland and Irish people experienced a process of gendering, few scholars have attempted to identify the participation of various women themselves in nationalist renderings of woman, and their simultaneous appropriation of

it to further feminist goals. Cousins's case demonstrates how such gendering, up to a point, facilitated the emergence of a self-conscious feminist ideology which in turn transformed the context of nationalism. The imaging of the nation as a woman, and the confinement of women in the domestic sphere, may well have been a strategy of nationalist males eager to salvage some ground as compensation for that which they had lost through colonial rule. Cousins borrowed this rhetoric and used it for her own ends by exposing the gap between the actual treatment of women and the gloried mythological treatment of women. Catherine Nash notes that nationalists reacted to the colonial feminization of Irishness by insisting on the hyper-masculinity of the race, especially when militant suffragist women were "destabilizing" the traditional lines of gender, so that the need to fix the masculinity of the nationalists as active agents of the nation became ever more crucial. However if suffragist competition stimulated a hardening of nationalist sexism, nationalists also learnt from militance and were transformed by the symbolic force of the potency of women which was accommodated by a tradition of active female nationalists in both constitutional and unconstitutional contexts. And, as Mary Cullen points out, the fact that British suffragists were partially inspired by Irish nationalist militance suggests a complex interplay between

Irishness, gender and empire.¹⁵ Nationalist ideas of woman, and women's ideas of the nation, in fact produced Cousins in dialogic just as she transformed the context of cultural nationalism by participating in it as a feminist.¹⁶

In summing up her Irish suffragist ideology, Cousins wished for an expansion of the public political sphere to include certain "high-minded" women in furtherance of her larger dream of spiritual sexual evolution. In this she was quite willing to defer the dismantling of hierarchical structures of class. In fact much of her ideology implicitly reinforces the prevailing class structure even if explicitly she was not an advocate of class inequality. It is far from clear that Cousins saw national independence as an imperative in this process although she sympathized in theory with the nationalist project. Cousins's vision of a reformed modernity was strongly nuanced if not wholly informed by a "return" to aristocratic, feudal codes of intersexual and interclass respect, and divisions of power in which ideals of democracy

¹⁵Richard Evans, The Feminists: Women's Emancipation Movements in Europe, America and Australasia 1840-1920 (London, 1977), cited in Mary Cullen, "How Radical Was Irish Feminism Between 1860 and 1920?" Radicals, Rebels and Establishments, Historical Studies XV, Dublin, Appletree Press, 1985, 197.

¹⁶For the best study to date of actual and imagined women in the Celtic Revival see C.L. Innes, Woman and Nation in Irish Literature and Society, 1880-1935 (Athens: The University of Georgia Press, 1993).

and national freedom were marginalized in favor of a focus on the actual well being of society.

Ultimately what Cousins's experience of Ireland reveals about Irish society is that because any consciousness of gender politics was new, any critique of Irish gender politics was represented as anti-male and (almost concomitantly) as anti-nationalist. What Cousins's ignoring and actively anti-feminist critics completely and deliberately missed, and this is also true for India, was how Cousins's partially neo-conservative vision of an actual Irish femininity was a freshly laundered vision of their own abstract vision of a pure motherland. The pot was in effect calling the kettle black.

In 1925 Cousins paid her first visit to Ireland after having spent ten years in India. While she and James Cousins both wrote in the autobiography of how they had then found independent Ireland disappointingly dead and narrow, at the time Cousins wrote encouragingly to Hanna of how she had as much "faith as ever in Ireland."¹⁷ Cousins saw the newly won independence of the Republic of Ireland as something of a modern miracle and a source of inspiration for Indian

¹⁷ Although when Hanna turned to participate in Irish party politics Cousins wrote: "You have my entire sympathy in the difficult path you have chosen of a party woman. I foresee a point at which you will be forced to choose between feminism and party as we were in the Home Rule Party days - the spirit of Frank will then be your greatest help." Cousins to Hanna Sheehy Skeffington, 23 August 1925, Sheehy Skeffington Papers, MS 24,117.

nationalism. She also included however an important laudatory comment on the partition of Ireland which rhymed with her pre-1930s Besantite Commonwealth nationalism: "Within the Irish miracle is included the pride of Northern Ireland in its own Home Rule Parliament and the introduction of Irish as a compulsory subject in the schools;"¹⁸ She was also taken aback then by the Catholic identity of the free state: "Nothing in Ireland impressed me so much as its emergence as a Catholic country, that great bulk of Catholic women."¹⁹ While "that great bulk of Catholic [and Protestant] women" continued to struggle with Irish patriarchy in the post-independence period, Cousins's gaze had of course shifted to India.

Some aspects of Cousins's principles remained firm throughout her transition to India. For example Cousins's rather anti-reservationist policy in India was motivated by the principle of proving that all women could work on the same terms as men, an unbroken continuation of the uncompromising sexual ideology which had ensured her disregard of the "favors" of class intrinsic to her Irish/English suffragist manifesto. Cousins's rejections of first the English socialist and then the Indian communalist feminist critique were both

¹⁸Cousins, "Miracles of Today," Adyar Bulletin (Oct 1925): 281-284.

¹⁹Cousins to Hanna Sheehy Skeffington, 23 August 1925, Sheehy Skeffington Papers, MS 24,117.

radically based on the fear that they might dilute the supreme issue of the sex war: "woman above all else." The die-hard universalist symbolic feminism which was Cousins's primary motivating strength logically preempted her from taking social and cultural divisions into account. If Cousins's feminist "victories" were patently enabled by coalitions of political forces which were never ideally democratic, at what point can her uncompromising yet compromising style of democratization be seen as her insistence on the freedom of woman to roam within the grand house of patriarchy? It is hardly surprising that Cousins' feminism in India was, however inadvertently, hegemonic. Far more interesting is the predicament in which she and her colleagues found themselves unable to relate to lower caste arrangements of sexual organization. It can well be posed that it is as "unfair" to level such a critique at Cousins - and all the "good" she did - as it is to level it at the efficacy of the AIWC and IWFL in attacking patriarchy and class when such institutions were so intimately structured by prevailing hierarchies of class. Such problems were much bigger than the AIWC could hope to solve.

As in Ireland Cousins's cultural maternalism requires contextualization in the social culture of the AIWC and the complex problems with which it was confronted. Charges of condescension and elitism in the AIWC executive must be figured in the context of the AIWC's repeated, if ineffective, attempts to "tackle social problems" concerning the "uplift"

of lower-caste women.

Both of the organizations founded and to a large extent guided by Cousins have been criticized for their middle and upper class Brahmanical and Brahmanizing character. While this is by and large true, the AIWC to its credit, did make notable interventions on behalf of exploited women miners, and on such lower caste issues as early child marriage, if only from a regulatory condescending position of caste authority. It was Cousins however who insisted that the voices of the mining women should be honored. Cousins's role in these movements shows ample evidence of her attempts to involve women of all social classes; from her efforts to initiate weaving classes to her encouragement of women toward economic independence long before Gandhi's promotion of village industries; her efforts to educate underprivileged children and orphans; her sustained commitment against untouchability customs. Further, Cousins' closest friends and stalwart admirers amongst Indian women, Muthulakshmi Reddy and Kamaladevi Chattopadhyaya, to name but two, tended toward a more inclusive, engagement of issues on the ground than many.

Still, Cousins's rhetoric and that of the AIWC agenda was in many ways idealistically oblivious to the cultural logic of caste and the reproduction of labor which practically infrastructured Indian society. In Cousins's case this was more often the fault of following Indian women's thought than

that of other Europeans.²⁰ The syncopation of Cousins's Irish "social purity" politics with the Brahmanistic agenda for a curb on lower-caste early motherhood serves merely to point up the continuity of class bound feminisms between Ireland and India. A striking difference between Cousins's political behavior in Ireland and India was that in India Cousins ensconced herself surely within the arch of the national movement, believing, with Gandhi, that satyagraha was an appropriate sort of "womanish/native" medium for all the concentric causes she envisioned, as well as for multi-layered strategic reasons. While in Ireland she had nudged the militant suffrage movement into at least a position of rhetorical alignment with the long tradition of Irish nationalist militance, she was implacably opposed to any relationship with the Congress' Irish correspondent, the Irish Parliamentary Party. Cousins viewed the Irish constitutionalists as "mere" wily constitutional politicians

²⁰As early as 1926 a Dutchwoman, Mrs Hindekoper from Indore, warned Cousins of how Indian women were privileging "the English educational system, language, and matric. examinations over Indian education and also were only thinking of professional classes, not of Harijans". She reminds Cousins "not to generalize from her Madras experience or anywhere in India," and implores Cousins to proceed slowly and carefully, implying that the problems which Cousins would like to rectify have been around for a long time and that she is not the first person to notice them. It was Hindekoper who suggested that the AIWC be an annual event and that subcommittees should be formed to allow the ideas to percolate, and to gain maximum feedback from all areas and levels. Hindekoper to Cousins, 11 Oct 1926, AIWC Papers, Roll 4, File 29.

who gave no support to the suffrage cause. One can be sure however that if they had supported the suffrage cause she would have supported them too regardless of what she thought of them otherwise. One can not therefore compare "the feminist/ nationalist dilemma" in Ireland and India through Cousins's case, precisely because she had learned so much from her dealings in Ireland and Britain before she ever went to India, (as had Indian interpreters of western suffragism), and so was eager to do things differently the next time. Cousins was very well aware of the rather nasty and murky reputation often assigned in the popular press, and by women in bodies such as the AIWC, to the notional western feminist as a raucous man hater, a stereotype which continues to function splendidly as an excuse for Indian anti-feminists as for Indian feminist and nativist essentialists. Cousins's dialectic between what contemporary feminist theorists term constructivism and essentialism can be seen as her tack through this virtual no-win situation; as a way to "sneak her points across;" as her desperate way of grabbing any familiar rhetorical vehicle going her way for the moment.

In India, as in Ireland, this random bricoleur style of activism, raises a question mark over Cousins's level of awareness regarding the long term risks involved in subscribing to both constructivism and essentialism. On the one hand Cousins's lived experience demonstrates literary feminist theorist Gayatri Spivak's conclusion that at some

point any active feminism must adopt some degree of essentialism to bind its existence.²¹ Cousins's case is also a lived history of historian Denise Riley's conclusion that the only way through the tedious impasse between deconstructing a feminist politics altogether, by following a Foucauldian perspective, or of oppressing some aspects of the open-ended diversity of womanhood by claiming an essential womanliness, is to skate with awareness over the thin epistemic ice - that is to know you are ironically propounding a pre-Foucauldian universe just in order to keep the feminist flag flying.²² Riley thus proscribes a split level or bi-focal ideological rhetoric. Cousins would seem to have adopted this bifocal rhetorical style out of necessity all the way along in both Ireland and India. However, the problem is that she did it so evenly, so well, so fluidly, and so apparently sincerely, that it is not clear at any point where Cousins herself consciously stood on this late twentieth century problem, or indeed if it ever registered with her as a phenomenon, much less as a problem.²³ There may well have been

²¹Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, The Post-Colonial Critic: interviews, strategies, dialogues Edited by Sarah Harasym, (New York: Routledge, 1990).

²²Denise Riley, "Am I that Name": Feminism and the Category of Women in History (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1988).

²³Cousins's rhetorical ambivalence here offers a

a certain blind and naive wisdom to Cousins's dogged insistence on essentialist universalism however if one appreciates the arguments put forth by Neil Lazreg et al on the necessity of universalism.²⁴ It is quite possible that Cousins saw beyond the nature/nurture or constructivist/essentialist binary out of sheer necessity, because with no margin for digression or fine academic analysis she could not afford such luxury as theory and thus she just preached intuitively "what she felt was right." Yet Cousins's theory of culture, sexual and beyond, was of course, the cultural relativism of Theosophy.

I have already elaborated on how Cousins used the imperial-nationalist notions of the Irish nation as a bound up female to suffragist advantage. What I have not yet specified is the way in which Cousins's feminist universalism, and her celebration of the "folk soul" in both Ireland and India (and to be fair to her, everywhere else as well) were intimately connected on very many levels. First how her feminist philanthropy was subtly but definitely linked to her modernist/primitivist cultural politics and aesthetic; and then how these, her public crusades, functioned in relation to

classic illustration of Homi Bhabha's analysis of the economy of colonial ambivalence in "The Other Question: Homi K. Bhabha Reconsiders the Stereotype in Colonial Discourse," Screen, 24:6 (1983) 18-36.

²⁴Neil Lazarus et al, "The Necessity of Universalism," Differences 7(Spring, 1995):75-146.

her "private" or interior life at a very subtle and abstract but emotionally powerful level.

Cousins's social landscape in both Ireland and India reflected, and at least in part, caused and constituted her interior. Basically Theosophy's hopes for the Irish and Indian race soul to raise the spiritual conditions of modernity above the brutal, garish, modern human condition provided an ideological and institutional architecture in which Cousins could live securely without explicitly voicing such an emotionally and intellectually vulnerable need. While Cousins sanctioned such lofty philosophy and idealism she was compulsive about proving it empirically, by putting into concrete organizations, laws, and archives such symbols of the inherent goodness and healing powers of these native spirits of Ireland and India.

The key medium linking Margaret Cousins to the spirit of such aesthetic nativism was her husband's literary interest. It was James Cousins's literary and philosophical connections which, apart from her feminist circles, in large part defined his wife's social schedule. While Margaret Cousins was not of course James Cousins, it needs to be said that she never challenged his cultural politics any more than he did hers. In fact they consciously co-operated and facilitated each other's expressions and cultural designs. Here one must ask what was James Cousins's appeal for Margaret Cousins? She met him first through the intellectual circles of the Celtic revival. The

ideal of resurrecting a Celtic Irish culture for the modern world was the basic platform of values they shared. James Cousins was a sort of "poor man's Yeats" who congratulated himself in India for actually going to that mecca of alternativism which his Celticist colleagues back home like AE could "only dream of." In 1945 James Cousins was still somewhat bitterly reassuring himself that -

the modernist influence does not seem to have quite smothered the Celtic imagination. Certain things are fundamental in races and emerge as grass - shoots through layers of earth. Of course there is nothing in these verses that gives the thrill of greatness or vision. A passage by the early Yeats or a stanza by AE at any stage of his poetical life makes these post rebellion poems like "sounding brass or tinkling cymbal."²⁵

The abundance of James Cousins's adventuring spirit however was facilitated by the scarcity of his literary talent. James Cousins's writing talents made little impression in Ireland. The cultural general of the Irish Celtic revival, W.B. Yeats, tired of Cousins's bouncing literary ego very quickly:

I have written Fay a very severe letter about Cousins' play Sold in U.I. [The United Irishman] They talk of doing it at once. I have made no objection to their doing it but I have told them that it is 'rubbish and vulgar rubbish.' I have wound up by saying that I did not mark the letter private - he might show it if he liked. Cousins is evidently hopeless and the sooner I have him as an

²⁵James Cousins to "Raja," 12 October 1945, James Cousins File, Theosophical Archives, Adyar.

enemy the better. I think Fay will see from my letter that, although I do not interfere with their freedom to produce what they like, too much Cousins would make work in common out of the question.²⁶

Three literary critics of the Anglo-Irish revival make the point that Yeats' dramatic work at this stage was not very different, certainly in terms of content, if not in terms of quality, from that of Cousins, an assessment which suggests questions about the quasi-Theosophical cultural politics lurking in Yeats' strict dictation of the national dramatic canon.²⁷

²⁶On 22 April 22 1902, Yeats wrote to Frank Fay that they "must get all the good plays they could 'from Cousins and Russell and anybody else, but carrying out our theories of the stage as rigorously as possible." It was later that Yeats more or less dismissed Cousins's work for the Abbey Theater. Robert Hogan and James Kilroy, Lost Plays of the Irish Renaissance, (Proscenium Press, 1970), 12-13.

²⁷"Actually Yeats is much too severe on this particular play and rather obtuse about Cousins generally. Sold had a quite promising first act, and even though its second act fell off into conventional farce it was a better play than many which the Abbey later produced, and certainly a better play than Fred Ryan's which Yeats admired. in his other plays, Cousins does not seem really too far from Yeats' own ideas. Aside from this one comedy Sold, Cousins wrote two kinds of plays: historical dramas of a strongly poetic tinge, like The Sleep of the King, The Sword of DermotP. S. O'Hegarty, who was a very sound and knowledgeable critic, once remarked, "The difference between Riders to the Sea and The Racing Lug is the difference between a great artist and a minor one - the material is the same." Starting with the same basic materials, Cousins nicely sustains a growing tone of fatality.....But even when these distinctions era made, it must yet be admitted that The Racing Lug is a worthy and still effective play." Robert Hogan and James Kilroy, Lost

The question of why the Cousinses left Ireland is not an easy one to answer and there was of course more than one reason. High school teaching in a relatively mainstream school was not James Cousins's cup of tea. The Cousinses were basically western refugees who rejected an urban industrial capitalistic West as the ultimate losing side, preferring to nurture what they then conceived of as the then current global political under dog, as the ultimate spiritual future alternative in the East. Margaret Cousins certainly wanted to continue "living for the cause." The Cousinses, like many another creative spirit, also sensed that out of Ireland they might find more space and freedom for self expression. Or then perhaps they became creative to escape. Even before they left Ireland for their five year stint in India, they were already roving about the continent and England. It was almost inevitable, given their philosophical interests, that they should end up in India sooner or later. Why they stayed for so long is probably a better question. Once there they seemed determined never to leave except for temporary stints abroad and only once did they revisit Ireland. India was their cause, their reason to be, their life.

While India, and the Theosophical International Headquarters in particular, was a place which accommodated Western dreamers, mystics, and "odd ball" characters of

unknown genius, the material realities of Irish culture offered few such nests. Margaret Cousins could shelter in the wings of her husband's literary show and could herself find indirect legitimization to escape from a regular job in the promised socially therapeutical benefits of his lyrical applications. Theosophy, literally, put a roof over their heads. Both Cousinses of course worked very hard on all kinds of levels, making huge social contributions voluntarily, not to mention some gruelling teaching loads at Madanapalle, but always in the spirit of counter culture.²⁸ Ireland did not accommodate the Cousinses very well. Ireland was also phasing out its need to distribute the burden of national causes amongst Protestant Theosophist poets and feminists such as the Cousinses. First, they were Protestants, and while many a Protestant was well accommodated in Ireland, this pair were actually not quite "Protestant" enough either in property or pedigree support their full blown literary and activist habits.²⁹

²⁸ James Cousins once got into trouble with some Madanapalle parents for his institution of "the love system" as an alternative to the cane system. What is interesting is that one senses that such bonds of open, non-systematized, emotional, and physical intimacy were deeply difficult for the Cousinses. Their fetishes for "love systems" with Indian youth perhaps compensated for the lack of emotional intimacy in their marriage.

²⁹ Irish Catholics were gradually cornering some of the responsibility for representing Irish identities, especially to foreign and emigrant populations, and were reworking earlier nineteenth century colonial representations of

Margaret Cousins's interest in reviving and preserving both Irish and Indian folk music as well as her love for high European classical music worked in parallel to James Cousins's poetic agenda. The basic politics underlying both of their aesthetic agendae were the Theosophical politics of a unity in diversity, so that while they both aimed to unite people through a sharing of the arts they also had to insist on the fixity, stability, originality and eternity of that diversity. Margaret Cousins also consciously consumed the ethnic epistemic slurs and stereotypes in Theosophical notions about the Irish and Aryan race souls as potential feminine cures for a masculine West, possibly because more than anything she felt the need of a connection with "the feminine."

"Exotic" India also provided a far more representable commodity for the Cousinses than did Ireland. Margaret Cousins enunciated far more volubly on the Indian race soul and the "oriental feminine" far more than she had ever represented Ireland in such essentialist terms. This was partly because of the lesser amount of public time she spent in Ireland, and the scarcity of records for her Irish period, but one suspects also that she felt she could get away with feminist orientalist shibboleths in India far more easily than she might have done in Ireland. More than anything else in India

Irishness into Catholic narratives. Thus the market for popular literary packagings of Irish Celtic identity, such as James Cousins offered was not as wide open as before. See Catherine Candy, Priestly Fictions: Priests and Popular Irish Literature (Dublin: Wolfhound, 1995).

Cousins wanted to be accepted into "the fold of Indian women;" to be accepted, and moreover to be trusted, as she put it, as a "sanyassi (spiritual pilgrim) sister." When Cousins asked Sarojini Naidu, for instance, (sometime before 1921) of her opinion of the prospects for the Indian women's movement, Naidu took Cousins's hand and squeezed it. Cousins wrote of the incident with great affection, almost purring with pleasure: "It bridges and knits the human sisterhood together."³⁰ From the very beginning, Cousins's activism in Ireland, in England, and in India, was rewarded by that sense of closeness to her comrades which made her feel like their "kith and kin." She was also especially proud of her ability to sustain other women's trust and reliance on her as a stalwart mother figure who would never steer them wrong. Cousins's desire for kinship, or solidarity of cause, with women in general was therefore one of the reasons why she wanted women and particularly women as "exotic" as Indian women, to join hands with womanhood the world over. The unspoken implication in Cousins's mind seems to have been that if she, and white women, could become one with Indian women it would surely signal a moment of self-transcendence. The idea and the process of an abstract global sisterhood which Cousins cherished thus in fact sublimated her desires for closer bonds of actual local intimacy.

³⁰Cousins, The Awakening of Asian Womanhood, 109.

Musing on how her own role in India would be reviewed by future commentators, Cousins fed the future press by pointing out how so many young "enlightened" Indian women had trusted her:

My own share of this would be forgotten, or perhaps thought of in a theatrical or self-important kind of way. It was sufficient to have earned the love and confidence of women and girls who were apparently of a new order, who had entered life at one of the major crises, and would either carry it forward to an era of Peace such as could arise out of the conserving and nourishing quality of free womanhood, or act as a brake on the descent to ruin that seemed to be the inescapable end of the purely masculine way of life.³¹

And of course Cousins had indeed earned the love and respect of many of her colleagues. Cousins did provide a role model and a confident feminist energy to many women both in India and in Ireland. Cousins discovered very young that, as she put it, her "greatest happiness lay in full service" and she urged this as a dictum on her co-workers. She chose for her own emotional security and well being to sink her self, and her personality, in her cause; to be defined by her mission. Cousins commented at several places throughout her life on her desperate need for a sense of submission to a cause in order to feel fulfilled - to feel alright about life. Here she recommends a cause as the great savior of women in particular:

³¹Cousins and Cousins, 605.

"Causes save one", remarked a wise woman once. This is particularly true of women. Their line of least resistance is self-sacrifice. They do not naturally move towards fighting for their own freedom, but through throwing themselves into a "cause" they achieve their own liberation. The "cause", however, must itself be related to the attainment of some aspects of progress or emancipation.³²

Cousins's sense of self-esteem and emotional well being was always utterly dependent on her involvement in the good fight. Even before she left for India she wrote to Hanna Sheehy Skeffington of how:

I hope I'll find some kind of career or vocation for myself in India in my own right such as I had in the IWFL [Irish Women's Franchise League] and those last years in Ireland. I have had plenty to do here but it has been of a higgledy piggledy kind. I prefer straight lines even though they be hard.³³

And again to boost a disillusioned Hanna she told her how:

We must realize that the battle of thought, self-sacrifice and loyalty to idealistic convictions is in the long run doing more for the evolution of all the causes of freedom, human and national we have at heart.³⁴

³²Cousins, The Awakening of Asian Womanhood, 60.

³³Cousins to Hanna Sheehy-Skeffington, undated, Sheehy Skeffington Papers, MS 22, 648 (iii).

³⁴Cousins to Hanna Sheehy-Skeffington, n.d. Sheehy Skeffington Papers, MS 22, 688.

It was essential for Cousins that the "cause" must look beyond sexual politics and that the energy and awakened consciousness released from that struggle should spill over necessarily into a web of social reforms. The woman's cause therefore saved Cousins consciously from the emptiness, meaningless and alienation which she felt most acutely during her spell in urban industrial Garston, and it also legitimized her non-mother status as she displaced her energy into a metaphorical mothering of society. Cousins was the true reformer - as she put it herself: "always wanting to change things into better shape."

A philosophic mind accords peculiarly with an emotional nature passionate for reforming glaring evil and injustice. It is through this queer assortment of attitudes that I have had to handle life.³⁵

Living in India as a white woman also meant that Cousins was marked there in different ways than she would have been in Ireland. Because her movements were more restricted there and her campaign seemed to her to be much more of a herculean task there, she felt a more immediate emotional and spiritual sense of reward and self-fulfillment from the smallest whiff of "progress." Every little advance meant so much, in territory she perceived as virginal to her touch. In another western country the many opportunities to do so many causes would have

³⁵Cousins and Cousins, 73.

been both depressing, too complex, confusing and decentering for her - she "preferred straight lines, even though they be hard" because progress there was more visible.

Cousins was dependent on the ideal of progress. She simply had to create a new universe rather than accept the one that was there - "to reform the world according to the heart's desire."³⁶ While Cousins had no children to form or reform she had instead a carefully thought through cultural blueprint of reform for everybody else's children. Cousins in fact felt she had no option but to live life "on the grand adventure scale" with a sort of compulsive, extraordinary dynamism, in order to justify her existence to herself, in order to prove to herself that she was not "letting anything go by default." Cousins's actions were therefore unquestioningly sanctioned by a history of democratic individualism; by notional Vedic "traditions" of sexual complementarity; and by the providential logic that the woman's cause was the "time-spirit's" cutting edge of the moment. She never had to critique her position because the battle was always too hard. It also meant however that while she always felt sure that she was on the right moral track, and was putting her life to the best use possible, she was always living for the future rather than enjoying the actual present. Cousins gladly and consistently made enormous personal material sacrifices, offering up every hardship for

³⁶Cousins and Cousins, 620.

the cause. She had such a materially precarious life, living always from hand to mouth, with little comfort, although she was often thrilled by "windfalls" from people who respected and appreciated her work and would do her and her husband little favors, such as having them stay at their homes in various parts of the world. Such bounty pleased Cousins as signs of the natural and supernatural compensation for her noble sacrifices and gave her that crucial sense of kinship, affinity and intimacy with the giver as a soul mate in the grand cause.

Cousins also found it difficult to ask for help unless it was for a spiritually approved cause. Once when visiting Srinagar she and James ran out of money and Cousins had the rather ingenious brainwave of writing to Muthulakshmi Reddy to ask that Reddy send her money for a pilgrimage trip to the caves of Amarnath instead of buying her a sari as Reddy and Cousins's other "Madras Lady friends" had earlier promised: "Now I am going to do something I never did before, - ask for something for myself!" Cousins assured Reddy that any benefit she would receive would be shared with them and used "for the good of India," if they would think of her "amongst themselves as a Sannyasi kind of sister." Cousins obviously still felt the need to justify her request in missionary terms, should her friends find her request offensive; "I never thought I should write like this to anyone! I am renouncing personal pride in the quest for spiritual experience." Cousins's

awkwardness and insistence on conveying that discomfort, and yet asking anyway, was a conscious display of her vulnerability; how she was ready to "lower herself" in the name of the cause. It shows just how isolated Cousins liked to be, cut off from reliable sources of material support in crises such as these, that even twelve years after arriving in India she had no closer a familial or material support system than this. It is also interesting that it was a sari she was renouncing and that it was a sari that her Indian lady friends wished to give her. One of her WIA and AIWC colleagues' daughter, Lakshmi Swaminathan, remembers how Cousins always kept a very unkempt appearance and cared little for dress style, wearing always simple homespun cotton khadi and laughing off the encouragements of her women friends "to dress herself up a little bit" (as they expected more class from a European!) with the joke that she was born under a dirty star.³⁷ The nobility of the cause was all.

Part of Cousins's desire to sink her identity in a wider, deeper and longer cause than her individual self came from her desire for a sort of self transcendence in acts of social and cultural transgression. This desire to connect found expression on a number of levels. One lay in her lifelong efforts to build communities, and to communicate to various publics in the most forthright direct way. Hence her drive for

³⁷Lakshmi Swaminathan, interview by author, 18 December 1994, New Delhi.

joining and forming clubs, societies, networks, churches, organizations, her international connections, her networking in India at all levels; her own writings in books; in newsletters in the Irish Citizen; in Stri Dharma; her constant flow of letters to newspapers around the world, and to people. Indeed the Theosophical Society's communal life and basic dictum of "unity in diversity" institutionally underpinned and geographed her spiritual desires. Cousins's early explorations in being a psychic medium and automatic writer also opened her internal world up to a deeper invisible "other" world. Another manifestation of her transgressive mode was her constant need to reach out to new publics. Cousins was forever proud of her social skills in getting along with people from all walks of life - of never feeling, as she put it, any sense of separateness. Yet she also seemed pleased to be set apart from other westerners in India by her social intimacy with Indians, a reputation which she felt flattered her with a sense of integrity, authenticity, and an apparently inexhaustible capacity for human intimacy.

The need for social assurance motivated much of Cousins's political modus operandi; her insistent ideological appeals to her Irish colonial identity, and the special relationship of Ireland to India; her defence of feminist internationalism; her insistence on women's need of a cause for personal liberation; and her Theosophical universal "one world perspective." In a similar vein Cousins took great pains to

emphasize the transcendental aspect of the Indian freedom movement, emphasizing the great and generous sense of social bonding which legitimized her belonging therein - on the Indian "side."³⁸ Cousins therefore relished and publicized (with a possible tinge of that wishful thinking which characterized so much of her writing), that the national movement in India had provided a sort of carnivalesque occasion when normal ritual boundaries of sexual difference and class and caste were conflated into one big happy spiritual community - and a new space was opened up to such well wishing outsiders as Cousins herself to transgress national, racial and sexual boundaries. As she explained in a book on Indian womanhood in 1939 which was specifically geared to educate North Americans, as outsiders, on the subject of the Indian national movement:

In the great crusade between 1929 and 1933 women of all castes, communities, all degrees of poverty and wealth shared the burdens, the pain and sacrifices, the joys, and the individual new freedom of acting in response to the need of the moment without reference to old precedents, customs, shibboleths of "proper" sex-conduct and sex separativeness. Men

³⁸ Chattopadhyaya in particular remembered Cousins's utter exasperation with Lady Irwin, wife of British administrator Lord Irwin, on one occasion when Lady Irwin thought Chattopadhyaya would not sit at lunch with her owing to Chattopadhyaya's nationalist feeling. Cousins remarked to Chattopadhyaya that if she was the swearing type she was very close to swearing then - presumably at Irwin's petty perspective on how she expected Indian women would automatically revile her. Kamaladevi Chattopadhyaya, Oral Transcript, NMML.

and women acted as souls, not as sexes, and soul-force was their weapon.³⁹

As the primary boundary of conflict for Indians was now national rather than sexual, Cousins felt that the freedom movement was desexualizing war by spiritualizing and demilitarizing the style of international resistance and conflict. The trumpeted lack of sexual boundaries however appealed to Cousins for how it could release and show case the virility of Indian women. There is something of the almost voyeuristic sensual objectification of Chattopadhyaya in Cousins's profile of her protege as one of the beautiful beacons in the national movement: "Srimati Kamala devi was the leader of the youth in them, her beauty, eloquence, brains, audacity and charm making her particularly popular."⁴⁰ Cousins always took great pride and delight in grooming younger Indian women as international advertisements for India, in a way that never seems to have occurred to her to do for women of other countries, or Ireland. Neither did she ever present herself as a formal antidote to any assumed global image of "the Irishwoman."

³⁹Cousins, "Towards Progress and Freedom," in The Awakening of Indian Women (Specially Compiled for Europeans and Americans who may require information on the hopes, aims and ambitions of the women of India), ed. Kamaladevi Chattopadhyaya and others, (Madras: Everyman's, 1939), 51-58.

⁴⁰Cousins and Cousins, 524.

Certain Indian women's celebration of Cousins as "one of ourselves" however can be set against a general criticism of the class bias of the AIWC. Tracing Cousins's experience as it was shaped through the culture of the AIWC refigures the question of the influence of an "imperial feminism" on indigenous feminist agenda as Cousins's feminist ideology was reconstituted by a four decades of Indian history. Cousins's particular biography is also available for a probing of the extent to which message drowned out medium, as her feminist politics in the great majority of cases overcame the jealous politics of authenticity about who could and could not speak. While Cousins arrived in India with a certain amount of orientalist baggage, what happened to it once there was another story. In fact Cousins used her orientalism selectively, as if knowing that it "worked" on some levels and not on others. As Cousins worked as a human being with the executives of the women's organizations, spent time in jail, taught high school and so on, like everybody else her politics became reconstituted by her experiences. And to her acquaintances and friends in the AIWC she was a heroine. The following fulsome praise from Cousins's longtime friend and founding AIWC member, Hilla Rustomiji Faridoonji, on the occasion of Faridoonji's controversial "canvassing" for Cousins's election as President of the AIWC in 1936 is not atypical of the sense of love which women of that circle expressed for Cousins in her latter years.

I feel that we ought to elect Mrs. Cousins his year. I know that there are several worthy ladies in India, and one or two in every constituency perhaps, but my own feeling is that, of all women, Mrs. Cousins has the greatest claim on us. We are what we are, a strong and influential all-India body due to her initiative energy, enthusiasm and real hard work at the beginning. She would have been elected long ago only her absence from India intervened...It would be ingratitude on our part if we do not honour a woman, to whom we owe everything. A woman, who has never spared herself, put up with discomfort and inconvenience like travelling in third class from north to south and east to west, and whose one thought has always been the welfare and progress of Indian women and the AIWC.⁴¹

Yet Cousins's position in India was always vulnerable and increasingly so as the national movement escalated. And perhaps it is ironic that it was the very precedence and infrastructure of imperial interference in Indian cultural reform (which had sanctioned Cousins's intervention there until the crucial boundary of the Quit India movement), which was then followed closely (and not perhaps entirely coincidentally) by the stroke which put an end to her speeches for Indian womanhood.

Cousins's sense of herself and her project in India was crucially shaped by the war and the shifts in colonial perspectives in its wake. Far from escaping from the ghastly politics of war in India as the Cousinses expected, the war of

⁴¹Faridoonji to Kaur, 29 April 1936, AIWC Papers, Roll 16, File 230.

course followed them there and continued to sweep their fortune in the direction of an "Eastern," pacifist maternalism appropriate to their new cultural vantage point.

The Cousinses therefore found themselves negotiating a configuration of Ireland and India as alternatives to the devilishly imperial and trigger-happy insane British monster and Cousins's feminist ideologization appears to have followed a certain pacifist maternalist suit into the war years and well beyond. Both the anti-imperialism and the feminist ideology worked in tandem off an image of the capitalistic industrial West as "gone off the lines" of humanitarian rightness and Cousins's image and world were reconstituted in the process.

In one of her last public speeches, at Vellore in 1942, Cousins declared that "order is heaven's law." In this she was still invoking perhaps the key principle of enlightenment deism and indeed of Theosophy as a candle of hope against the apparent failure of "progress" and the onset of "retrogression."⁴² Like many of her contemporaries, Cousins perhaps could not admit to consciousness the possibility of a retrogression in civilization on the scale of the second world war and Britain's treatment of Indians during the Quit India movement.

Cousins's particular experience and interpretation of her

⁴²Cousins, Speech to Tamilnad Branch of AIWC, December 1942, Vellore, AIWC Papers, Roll 16, File 276.

world nuances almost every book in the bibliography below. Here I outline some of the major historiographical shortcomings which Cousins's case illuminates. What Cousins's experience tells us about the politics of white women's interactions with Indian feminists is that ultimately class was a far more important divider of women in India than race or nationality, making India no different than Ireland or Britain. On its own Cousins's Irishness scarcely mattered. As was the case with anybody in India, Indian or not, it was her personality, her diplomatic cleverness, sensitivity, sense of humor and her expressed sense of justice which won her so many Indian allies. Cousins's biography also shows how the world of western women's interaction with Indians in the twentieth century was much more complex than has been represented in the historiography so far. This study functions as a deep biographical needle in the more broad based studies of Antoinette Burton, Barbara Ramusack, and Margaret Strobel, whose measuring of various western women's "success" in being accepted by third world women aggregates "the third world woman" into a unified and ahistorical abstract figure of judgment over a notional well meaning but naive western feminist. These works also neglect to examine some of the complexities - personal, religious, class - in western women's lives as well as in Indian women's lives which defined their range of approach to class, religion, sexuality in Europe,

India or Africa.⁴³

Such studies tend to begin from the false premise of finding the exception which proves the rule rather than looking at the ways in which the production of "the rule" served a variety of political constituencies, Indian and otherwise, then and still. They also tend to overrate the importance of the nineteenth century Raj as the defining principle of Indian-western interaction on people born in the early twentieth century.

Cousins's experience demonstrates how various women moved through various positions within the continuum of loyalty and disloyalty to empire depending on the changing context and on

⁴³Antoinette Burton, Burdens of History: British Feminists, Indian Women, and Imperial Culture, 1865-1915, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1994); Barbara N. Ramusack, "Catalysts or Helpers? British Feminists, Indian Women's Rights, and Indian Independence," in The Extended Family: Women and Political Participation in India and Pakistan. Edited by Gail Minault. Delhi: Chanakya, 1981; "Cultural Missionaries, Maternal Imperialists, Feminist Allies: British Women Activists in India, 1865-1945," in Women's Studies International Forum 13:4, 1990; Margaret Strobel. European Women and the Second British Empire. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1991. Nancy Paxton makes a refreshing but unsustained attempt to see Besant and Steel whole, and in complex context, in "Feminism Under the Raj: Complicity and Resistance in the Writings of Flora Annie Steel and Annie Besant." Womens' Studies International Forum 13:4 (1990): 333-336; For a critique of some of the problems of portraying the colonial experience as a two-sided one see Jane Haggis, "Gendering Colonialism or Colonizing Gender? A Review of Recent Women's Studies Approaches to White Women and the History of British Colonialism," Women's Studies International Forum 13 (1990):105-115.

their experience of Irish and Indian history, an experience in which colonialism was not always central, and often hardly mattered. However, a study of the anxious construction of the narrative of "western feminism" in Indian nationalist, social reform and feminist circles would reveal much about the sexual politics of Indian cultural and intellectual life and particularly about the role of the international and class image of "the Indian man" therein.⁴⁴ It would tell us more about the ways in which Irish and Indian women manoeuvred their various feminist agenda around both Indian male and female anxieties, rather than positing Indian feminism as an essentially special, mystical, ahistorical interruption of feminist history and theory elsewhere.⁴⁵ Such a historiographical framework would then help to locate Irish nationalists', Gandhian and Congress' management of gender issues in the context of imperial sexual political formations.

Much work remains to be done on the comparative biographical relationships of people like Chattopadhyaya, Naidu, Kaur, Rajwade, Reddy, Rathbone and various British mediators with Indian women, some of the latter of whom were accepted and respected, precisely because of the symbols of

⁴⁴See Mrinalini Sinha, Colonial Masculinity: the 'manly Englishman' and the 'effeminate Bengali' in the nineteenth century, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1995).

⁴⁵See Madhu Kishwar, "Gandhi on Women," Race and Class 28 (1986):43-61.

respect which they showed to Indian feminists. The political ambitions, petty jealousies and power-broking within Indian women's movements also needs outlining, as does a careful study of Indian women's representations of, and relations with Gandhi, Nehru and the Congress from the early 1920s to well after independence.⁴⁶ The biographical connections between nationalist leaders, Congress leaders, Muslim League leaders, the AIWC and WIA also need further teasing out, as the intimate politics of friendship formation between influential men and women, so often defined feminists' agendas.⁴⁷ Such biographical contextualization of the narratives of Indian women's movements and national movements would help destabilize the far too narrow, tedious and oppositional representation of western-Indian networks in the twentieth century. The viral "us" against "them" oppositionalism which has pegged the terms of the interaction around some terribly inevitable racial mistrust reduces the polymorphous human

⁴⁶Geraldine Forbes has best outlined the Franchise issue in "Votes for Women: the Demand for Women's Franchise in India, 1917-1937," in Symbols of Power: Studies of the Political Status of Women in India ed. Vina Mazumdar. (Bombay: Allied, 1979) and "The Politics of Respectability: Indian Women and the Indian National Congress," in The Indian National Congress: Centenary Hindsight ed. D.A. Low (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1988).

⁴⁷See D.A. Low, "Gandhi, Nehru and the Purna Swaraj Decision: New Potentialities for Asian Biography," Modern Asian Studies 12:3 (Winter 1984):23-42.

beings on both "sides" to ahistorical caricature.⁴⁸ Mrinalini Sinha's work on the Mother India Katherine Mayo controversy is a good model in this process based approach to the subject, where the voices of Indian women are contextualized and their particular biographical histories woven through the controversy.⁴⁹

Cousins's biography connects a wide range of scholarship in several disciplines on the patterns of gender and empire. Cousins's case shows just how sophisticated was the thinking of the chief cadre of the IWFL on the national issue when it could co-operate so freely with the WSPU, and northern unionist women and could take up broadly rhetorically nationalist positions without playing to the Irish Parliamentary Party. While in India the attempt on the part of the AIWC to keep all shades of government sympathizers and Congress sympathizers accommodated within the movement was partially, but far less successful. If this was a comparative study of feminist movements in Ireland and India then a far more indepth analysis of the Irish "post-Cousins"/ post 1913 period would be in order.

⁴⁸Satya P. Mohanty. "'Us and them': On the Philosophical Bases of Political Criticism," Yale Journal of Criticism 2:2 (Winter 1992), 1-33, and Chandra Talpade Mohanty, "'Under Western Eyes': Feminist Scholarship and Colonial Discourse," Feminist Review (Autumn 1988), 61-68.

⁴⁹Mrinalini Sinha, "Reading Mother India: Empire, Nation and the Female Voice." Journal of Women's History 6:2 (Summer, 1994):6-44.

However, where the strict focus on Cousins's experience can potentially make the most direct contribution is at the level of the contextualization of the representation of gender and nationality. For instance the emasculation of the Irish woman in India through her popular association (usually by Indian males) with the virile image of the Irish nationalist (also usually represented as male) could be comparatively biographed through Cousins, and a trickle of other Irish identified women who found political and spiritual spaces of social intimacy in twentieth century India which many westerners did not, such as Sister Nivedita (Margaret Noble) of Bengal, and Annie Besant.

It is hoped then that this demonstration of an attempted biographical integration of national, sexual and cultural difference on the part of Margaret Cousins can work as a critical reaffirmation of the still unexplored potential of universalism in feminist as well as other projects of intercultural understanding.⁵⁰

⁵⁰Lazarus, Neil, et al. "The Necessity of Universalism," Differences 7 (Spring 1995): 75-146.

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